

Excerpt page 202- Kinan and Dalzell 2005

"Flagship Species for Pacific Islanders: While generalities for cultural aspects over a geographic area as vast as the Pacific Islands can lead to misconceptions, it is worthwhile to note that Pacific Islanders, including those residing in Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, and CNMI, utilise and have a strong cultural relationship with their marine resources, including sea turtles (Johannes 1978; McCoy 1982; Campbell 2003; Frazier 2003). Turtles are an intrinsic part of the culture, subsistence, traditions, and folklore of the region (Balazs 1982; McCoy 1982; Campbell 2003). Traditionally, they are known to have played an important role in religious ceremonies, and perpetuating community relationships and identities through the exchange of turtle meat and turtle products (Johannes 1978, 1981; Balazs 1982; McCoy 1982, 1997). McCoy (1982:279) concluded 'that turtles contribute significantly to the overall cultural stability of the people [in the Marshall Islands]' and that 'their contribution in protein is not nearly as important as their cultural role.' However, the indigenous people residing in the US and US Pacific territories (Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, and CNMI) lost their cultural rights to harvest turtles when the US Endangered Species Act rendered harvest illegal. They have since requested an allowable cultural harvest of turtles, green sea turtles specifically, to perpetuate and strengthen cultural identity¹⁰ (McCoy 1997; Hara 2002; Ilo 2002). In this regard, sustainable use may allow turtles to assume a flagship role for indigenous Pacific islanders to promote cultural integrity (McCoy 1982, 1997; Hara 2002), and may further convey resource conservation ethics to younger generations (Johannes 1978; Morauta, Pernetta, and Heaney 1982; Spring 1982; McCoy 1997; Poepoe, Bartram, and Friedlander in press).

Although this concept may be controversial, islanders believe that strengthening cultural practices will revive traditional authority, resulting in limited harvest and increased protection of nesting beaches (Spring 1982; Ilo 2002); as has already proven to be the trend in certain Pacific Island nations, such as Fiji (SPC no date) and Vanuatu (Petro 2002). It is the belief of elders in Papua-New Guinea that '[by] following old traditions, turtles will still be plentiful' (Spring 1982:295). Furthermore, socio-cultural studies conducted in CNMI by McCoy (1997) suggest that the continuation and regeneration of cultural practice could allow limited use, yet provide more effective conservation measures than laws imposed from afar."