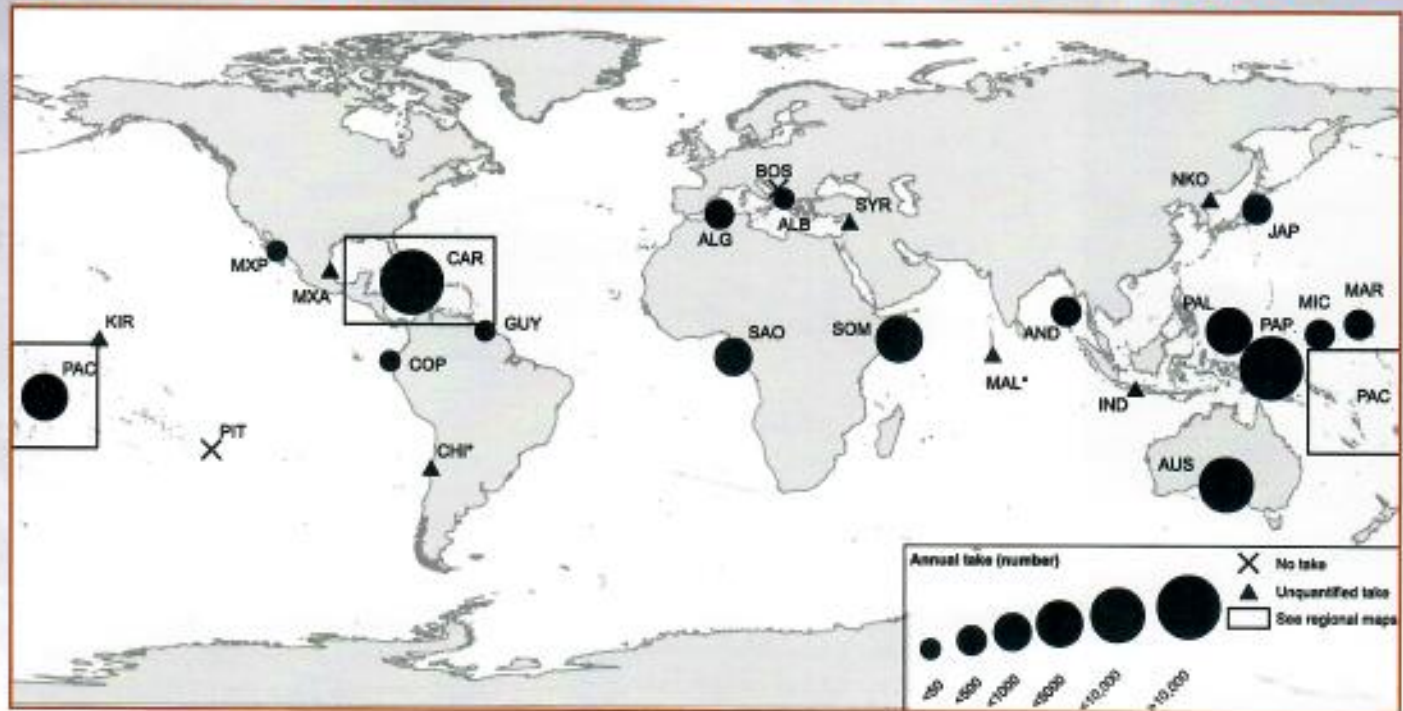


Sustainable Take of Sea Turtles: A Global Perspective



Estimated annual legal marine turtle take by country or territory (data from 1 January 2010 to 1 January 2013). Data for the Caribbean (CAR) and Pacific (PAC) regions have been grouped and are shown in further detail in Fig. 4a,b. No take = no known legal or illegal take; Unquantified take = illegal take data found only or take known to occur but no data available. *Country with moratorium. Country abbreviations (countries in brackets indicate dependency): ALB = Albania; AND = Andaman and Nicobar Islands (India); AUS = Australia; BOS = Bosnia and Herzegovina; CHI = Chile; COP = Colombia (Pacific coast); GUY = Guyana; IND = Indonesia; JAP = Japan; KIR = Kiribati; MAL = Maldives; MAR = Marshall Islands; MIC = Federated States of Micronesia; MXA = Mexico (Atlantic coast); MXP = Mexico (Pacific coast); PAL = Palau; PAP = Papua New Guinea; PIT = Pitcairn Islands (UK); SAO = Sao Tome and Principe; SYR = Syria. Take is also shown for countries with unverified legislation (ALG = Algeria; NKO = North Korea; SOM = Somalia). Note: Position of symbols is not representative of locations of take data. Source¹.

Sustainable use of sea turtles may seem like a foreign concept today, especially in the United States where sea turtles have been federally protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) for more than four decades. But across the Pacific Islands and throughout the world, sea turtles have been utilized as important natural and cultural resources for millennia. Much of the unsustainable “take” can be attributed to commercial-scale exploitation and trade that peaked in the early- to mid-1900s, which led to the prohibition of take under the ESA in the United States and restrictions on trade through the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in the 1970s.

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Sea Turtles: A Global Perspective

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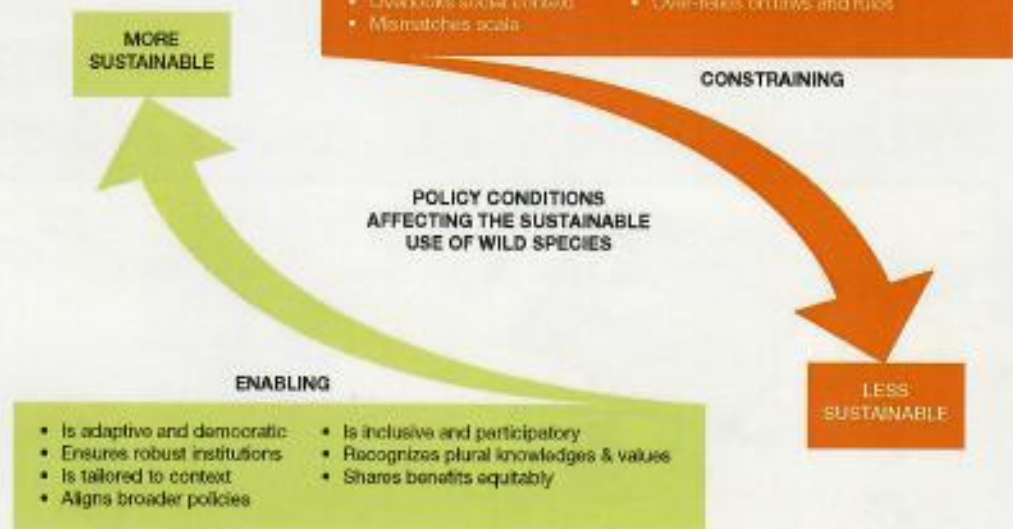
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Dedicated to ecosystem-based fisheries management in the U.S. Pacific Islands.



Source¹

Take as defined under the ESA means "to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct."

Today, the legal harvest of sea turtles and their eggs is still allowed in many parts of the world—42 countries and territories to be exact, according to a global assessment published in 2014. Most of the turtle species taken are green turtles. The majority of legal turtle take is located in small island states in the Pacific and the Caribbean, with take in the Pacific being characterized by cultural significance with associated customs, whereas take in the Caribbean tend to have regulations for closed seasons, size restrictions, permits and gear restrictions.

One of the regions with the largest remaining legal turtle fisheries is in the waters of Australia and Papua New Guinea by Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. The turtle fishery in Torres Strait is managed as a subsistence fishery for the traditional inhabitants of the area and through 15 indigenous community-based management plans developed with funding support from the Australian government. A scientific assessment conducted in 2016 showed that while there are uncertainties with the status of the green turtle populations, the harvest is likely to be at a sustainable level.

In Nicaragua, subsistence use of sea turtles is allowed on the Atlantic coast of the country, recognizing the Caribbean coastal communities' traditional rights use to natural resources. However, much of the country's traditional relationship with sea turtles changed during 200 years of foreign-led exploitation and trade that started in the 1800s. Turtle harvest is now driven by local market demand and turtle meat is commonly sold in the markets to generate income and feed one's family. Catch rates have been declining, which suggests that the foraging aggregations from which the turtles are harvested may be declining, but the population trend at the source nesting beaches at Tortuguero, Costa Rica is increasing. As a side note, Nicaragua is located within the range, but not a signatory to the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC). Thus, the country is not subject to the take prohibition under the IAC, which is a major barrier to allowing cultural harvest of turtles in the U.S. Pacific Islands (see the "Treaty Deadlock" article in the Winter 2022 issue of *Pacific Islands Fishery News* www.wpcouncil.org/wp-council-newsletters).

Another example of sustainable take is in Ogasawara, a small archipelago in Japan located half way between Tokyo and the Mariana Archipelago, where a regulated small-scale commercial harvest of turtles with an annual harvest limit has been maintained at a steady

level for decades. Green turtles seasonally migrate to the islands to mate and nest, so only the adults are harvested and harvesting is prohibited during the peak nesting season. The nesting population had been depleted by the early 1900s following several decades of overexploitation, but long-term monitoring data since 1975 show that the population has been recovering in recent decades, even with the steady level of harvest continuing to this day.

These examples represent the broad diversity of management approaches and local context surrounding the legal turtle harvests that exist today around the world. They are also examples of more than 10,000 wild species that are harvested for human food and contribute to human well-being,

as highlighted in the Assessment Report on the Sustainable Use of Wild Species, a new report adopted by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) in July 2022. IPBES, consisting of nearly 140 member states, is known as the “IPCC* for Biodiversity” and is the global science-policy body tasked with providing the best-available evidence to decision-makers.

As recognized in the IPBES Assessment Report on the Sustainable Use of Wild Species, sustainable use of sea turtles and other wild species is central to the identity and existence of many indigenous peoples and local communities. Policy and tools are most successful when tailored to the local context.

The report identifies key elements for the sustainable use of wild species, as well as pathways to promoting and enhancing sustainability in the face of climate change, increasing demand and technological advances. Key elements of policies and tools for promoting sustainable use include:

- ✦ *Policy options that are inclusive and participatory.*
- ✦ *Policy options that recognize and support multiple forms of knowledge.*
- ✦ *Policy instruments and tools that ensure fair and equitable distribution of costs and benefits.*
- ✦ *Context-specific policies.*
- ✦ *Monitoring of wild species and practices.*
- ✦ *Policy instruments that are aligned at international, national, regional and local levels; maintain coherence and consistency with international obligations and take into account customary rules and norms.*
- ✦ *Robust institutions, including customary institutions.*

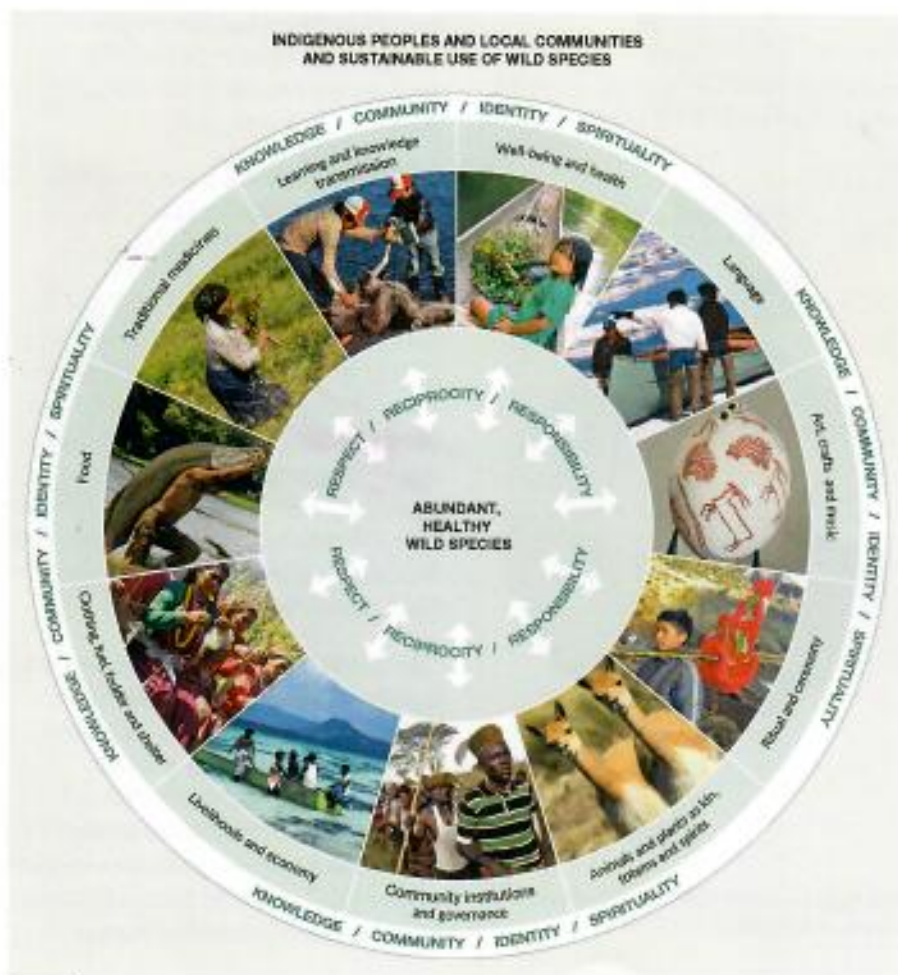
With appropriate management, local community involvement, monitoring and enforcement, sea turtle harvest can be sustainable, just as fishery management has been under the MSA. 🐢

*Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

Resources

¹2014 Global Assessment – Humber, F., Godley, B. J., & Broderick, A. C. (2014). So excellent a fish: a global overview of legal marine turtle fisheries. *Diversity and Distributions*, 20(5), 579-590: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/ddi.12183>

²IPBES Assessment Report on the Sustainable Use of Wild Species overview: https://ipbes.net/media_release/Sustainable_Use_Assessment_Published



Source²