

Recommendation offered by George Balazs at the SPREP Fourth Meeting of the Regional Marine Turtle Conservation Programme

Apia, Western Samoa
4-5 August 1994

Noting that there is a continuing and serious decline of turtle populations throughout the Pacific region, to the point where they are endangered;

Recognising that current levels of commercial and subsistence harvesting cannot be sustained on these depleted populations;

It is recommended that

tissue samples collected from sea turtles for DNA genetic analysis of stock identification, and other research, should not normally involve the intentional killing of animals (adults, juveniles, or hatchlings) for such purposes. Whenever and wherever possible, techniques other than sacrificing turtles should be employed. These alternate techniques may include: (1) utilising tissue from turtles that are being killed in existing subsistence and commercial fisheries; (2) utilising live but emaciated, weak, and therefore doomed hatchlings excavated from nests where the majority of vigorous, healthy hatchlings have already emerged and entered the sea (i.e., usually nests that are more than 70 days old); (3) utilising small plugs of muscle tissue from adults and juveniles taken with an easy-to-use biopsy punch; and (4) utilising small blood samples taken by personnel who have been properly instructed in this technique as well as the safe disposal of syringes and needles.

Rationale

The above recommendation strives to ensure that the SPREP Regional Marine Turtle Conservation Programme maintains consistency and integrity in all of its policies and practices. Special importance in this regard is given to the 1993 Programme Resolution (Third Meeting of RMTCP) declaring 1995 as the "Year of the Sea Turtle", specifically Recommendations (1) and (4), which state that:

there be an immediate and substantial reduction in the numbers of turtles killed throughout the region; and

1995 be ceremonially considered the "Year of the Sea Turtle" in the Pacific region, and that whenever and wherever possible and practical, on a voluntary basis, restraint be exercised in the killing of turtles for all purposes.