

**CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES OF  
WILD FLORA AND FAUNA**

**FIRST CITES WIDER CARIBBEAN HAWKSBILL TURTLE DIALOGUE  
MEETING  
MEXICO CITY (MEXICO) 15 - 17 MAY, 2001**

**NATIONAL REPORT**

**BELIZE**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Sea Turtles have been a specie that has historically been utilized in Belize. Ever since the colonial days, Belize, then British Honduras, exported hundreds of live Turtles for sale in the British markets and restaurants. It was also a source of food used by the Buccaneers, since it could be kept for long periods before being slaughtered.

Looking at the present status of Hawksbill Turtles Globally, set on Appendix I on CITES, Belize has put measures in place to ensure its existence. The following is a summary of the recommendations put by the Sea Turtle Recovery Action Plan (STRAP), CEP Report no. 8 done in 1992 by Eckert, Gibson and Smith, and the steps taken by Belize to comply with the recommendations.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS PUT BY STRAP**

**Status and Distribution**

Hawksbill of different sizes is often found in the extensive reef system that Belize has, which is the Second Largest in the World. It is however on an isolated beach near Gales Point Manatee where the highest concentration of Hawksbill turtle nesting occurs (cf. Meylan 1989). Over the past years, it has been documented that approximately 100-150 nests are laid every year (personal com with Leroy Andrewin). These nests have been documented over six month periods per year, since Andrewin is not at the site throughout the year. He only counts nests that he finds during morning walks, and seldom does night walks. It is thus considered that probably more nests are laid in the area, but there are no records. In STRAP it stated that majority of the eggs laid were destroyed by predators, but since the efforts by Andrewin, the percentage has increased to over 90%.

Other areas such as the Sapodilla Cays, Long Coco Cay and other mentioned in STRAP still have supported Hawksbill nesting, but the numbers are not as significant as Manatee. It was thus suggested that Belize clearly has a vital role to play in the conservation of these turtles.

### **Stresses**

In STRAP the main stresses were destruction and modification of habitat, over-utilization, inadequate regulatory measures and disease or predation. Recently since Belize has been affected by two hurricanes, Mitch and Keith, some damage has been recorded on some of the nesting beaches.

### **Regulatory Measures in 1992**

The closed season for turtles was from June 1<sup>st</sup> to August 31<sup>st</sup>. It was also illegal to take a turtle when on land. No person was to be in the possession of eggs, or a turtle under 50lbs. It was also illegal to set a net within a hundred yards of any shore or island in the waters of Belize or to export any turtle or turtle products. In regards to habitat alteration or destruction, there were only basic laws to protect reefs, and not much on sea-grass beds.

Even though several conventions and treaties had been adopted, such as RAMSAR (1971), Cartagena Convention (1983), Convention on Biological Diversity (1992), The Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982) and CITES (1973), most were not complied with.

### **Recommendations by STRAP**

STRAP had put forward many recommendations of which some of the most important are the following:

- Manage, identify & protect essential habitat
- Survey foraging areas & nesting habitats
- Develop area specific management (especially Manatee and Sapodilla Cays)
- Involve local coastal zone authorities
- Develop guidelines on lighting, mining, stabilization structures, setbacks, access, waste disposal marine pollution, destruction to corals and sea-grass, educational materials, industrial discharges, agricultural runoff and sewage, and anchoring damage
- revision of the existing law.

## **Measures Taken by Belize since STRAP**

Belize has so far put in a system of protected areas, and already has the entire reef system on the World Heritage Site Listings, thus providing adequate management and protection for essential foraging and nesting habitats. With these staff in place, work can now be carried out to survey the above-mentioned areas. Two of the main areas requested by STRAP to be given prompt attention are also in protected status, in which there is now a Marine Reserve for the Sapodilla Cays, and a Wildlife Sanctuary for Manatee Bay, two of the most important Turtle nesting sites.

Since the inception of the Coastal Zone Management Unit, it has now grown into an Authority, and has been of significant assistance in providing funding for protected areas and research.

In the development of guidelines there are now in place either Acts or Statutory Instruments that have regulations on mining, building of stabilization structures, waste disposal, access, design setbacks, marine pollution destruction of corals and sea-grass, industrial discharges, agricultural runoff and sewage, and anchoring. In respect to the latter, there has been put in place a National Mooring Buoy System.

The recommendation for the revision of the laws was also taken into consideration and they were changed to exactly what was recommended in STRAP.

Additional steps have been taken place such as complying with international treaties and conventions, the signing of the IAC, being a part of the Central American Sea Turtle Conservation Network and the Caribbean Working Group. Acknowledgement has also been given by Government for the Belize Sea Turtle Conservation Network (BSTCN) and the ratification of the IAC in the very near future.

Plans are presently being developed to conduct a nationwide survey and consultations to assess the extent on the use of sea turtles in Belize, which will help to provide the relevant information in complying with the ratification of the IAC.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is therefore evident that Belize has managed to put in place most of the recommendations in STRAP, and has shown interest in the protection of sea turtles, especially the Hawksbill. It has embraced the working group by allowing it to review all sea turtle proposals and to give its recommendations.