IOSEA 25 YEARS

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING ON THE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF MARINE TURTLES AND THEIR HABITATS OF THE INDIAN OCEAN AND SOUTH-EAST ASIA

CMS/IOSEA/AC11/Inf.6
2 November 2026

11TH MEETING OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Bonn, Germany, 8-11 December 2026
Agenda Item 6

RELEVANT OUTCOMES OF THE 15TH MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES

(*Prepared by the Secretariat*)

1. The 15th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS COP15) was held in Campo Grande, Brazil, from 23 to 29 March 2026. The meeting brought together delegates from 105 Parties, 337 observers representing NGOs, IGOs and non-Party States, and 54 representatives of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Under the theme *"Connecting Nature to Sustain All Life"*, Parties considered a range of issues of direct relevance to marine turtle conservation, including fisheries bycatch, illegal and unsustainable take, and the conservation of critical habitats.

Fisheries Bycatch

2. Fisheries **bycatch** remains one of the most significant threats to marine turtles. Through Resolution 12.22 (Rev.COP15) *Bycatch and Other Fisheries-induced Mortality* and Decisions 15.26-15.29, Parties reaffirmed their commitment to reducing bycatch and other fisheries-induced mortality of migratory species. The revised measures reiterate Parties' obligations to implement effective bycatch mitigation measures, including:
   - Prohibiting the retention of Appendix I-listed species; and
   - Ensuring that bycatch of Appendix II-listed species is maintained at, or reduced to, levels that do not threaten their conservation status.

3. The revised resolution further recognizes the fish maw trade as a driver of bycatch, highlighting the relationship between fisheries impacts on migratory species and international trade. Governments are encouraged to adopt proven mitigation measures, strengthen monitoring programmes, and support the development of solutions adapted to local fisheries and operating conditions.

4. Through Decisions 15.26-15.29, Parties, the Scientific Council and the Secretariat are directed to continue implementing practical measures to reduce bycatch and improve data collection, while strengthening international collaboration on bycatch mitigation. The Decisions also foresee the development and dissemination of further technical guidance and synthesis work to support implementation of CMS obligations relating to fisheries-induced mortality of migratory species.

5. The *Review of Technical and Operational Measures to Mitigate Bycatch of Marine Turtles in Commercial Fisheries* (Breimann & Baker, 2025), published as an Information Document for COP15 and included in the outcomes, provides a systematic assessment

of available mitigation measures across different fisheries. These include gear modifications, adjustments to fishing practices such as reduced soak times and deeper hook setting, and improved handling and release techniques.

6. The review highlights e.g. that pelagic longline fisheries pose a particularly high risk to loggerhead and leatherback turtles; however, the combined use of large circle hooks and whole fish bait has been shown to reduce bycatch by 55-90% - however, with trade-offs for shark bycatch. Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) deployed in trawl fisheries can reduce turtle bycatch by up to 97%, while the use of LED-illuminated gillnets has achieved reductions exceeding 93% in some fisheries. The review also notes that fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) can increase the risk of turtle bycatch in purse seine fisheries and recommends improvements to their design.

7. Fish Aggregating Devices (**FADs**) were also addressed at COP15 through Decisions 15.30-15.32. Recognizing that FADs can increase interactions between fisheries and migratory marine species, including marine turtles, Parties agreed on measures to promote the sustainable and environmentally responsible design, use and management of FADs, and to reduce their negative impacts on associated species and marine ecosystems.

Identification and Protection of Important Marine Turtle Habitats

8. Through Resolutions 15.3 *Priorities for Area-based Conservation of Marine Migratory Species* and 15.4 *Important Marine Turtles Areas*, and Decisions 15.52-15.56, COP15 formally recognized Important Marine Turtle Areas (**IMTAs**) as a science-based tool to support the identification and conservation of habitats important to marine turtles. IMTAs now form part of the broader suite of spatial conservation tools recognized within the CMS framework, alongside other initiatives such as Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) and Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs).

9. These tools provide governments with scientific information to support marine spatial planning and the conservation of migratory corridors and habitats. Parties are encouraged to integrate these tools into national conservation strategies and marine spatial planning processes to facilitate the protection of important marine turtle habitats both within and beyond national jurisdiction.

10. Through Decisions 15.98-15.100, Parties are encouraged to review and strengthen national **beach management** guidelines, identify and map existing nesting beaches, and support efforts to identify potential future nesting habitats that may become important. These actions are considered increasingly important in the context of climate change and ongoing anthropogenic pressures, including coastal development, dredging and coastal sand mining.

11. To support implementation, the CMS Scientific Council has been requested to develop guidance on this issue, building on work already undertaken by the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU Advisory Committee and endorsed by Signatory States. Collaboration between the Advisory Committee and the CMS Scientific Council provides an opportunity to maximize synergies across migratory species initiatives and to support evidence-based decision-making for the conservation of beach ecosystems.

12. These outcomes also contribute to the broader CMS objective of maintaining and enhancing **ecological connectivity** for migratory species by supporting the conservation of habitats and migratory corridors throughout the marine environment.

Seamount Ecosystems and Deep-Sea Mining

13. Parties adopted Resolution 15.5 *Conserving Seamount Ecosystems* on the conservation of seamount ecosystems. Seamounts are recognised as important biological hotspots and navigational features for marine migratory species, including marine turtles, sharks and marine mammals. The resolution and associated decisions address pressures associated with overfishing and destructive fishing practices, including bottom trawling, within these ecologically significant habitats.

14. CMS COP15 also reinforced a precautionary approach to deep seabed mining through Decisions 15.48-15.49 relating to Resolution 14.6 *Deep-seabed mineral exploitation activities and migratory species*. The report *Impacts of Deep-sea Mining on Migratory Species: Review and Knowledge Gaps* presented to the meeting highlighted substantial scientific uncertainty regarding the ecosystem-wide impacts of deep-sea mining. Potential risks to marine migratory species include underwater noise, toxic discharges and sediment plumes, which may affect navigation, prey availability and the integrity of both benthic and pelagic ecosystems used by marine turtles.

Hawksbill Turtle Single Species Action Plan

15. COP15 also advanced implementation of the *Single Species Action Plan for the Hawksbill Turtle (Eretmochelys imbricata) in South-East Asia and the Western Pacific Ocean Region*, which had been adopted at COP14. The new decisions reaffirm the importance of establishing an appropriate governance structure to support implementation of the Action Plan and ensure effective regional coordination and stakeholder engagement.

16. Non-Party States within the range of the species are also encouraged to participate in implementation efforts, reflecting the highly migratory nature of hawksbill turtles and the need for coordinated regional action.

Cross-Cutting Threats

17. Parties also adopted and renewed a number of measures addressing broader threats affecting migratory species, including marine turtles.

18. Decisions 15.33-15.38 continue mandates associated with work on aquatic wild meat, including implementation of Resolution 12.15 *Aquatic Wild Meat* and the *Action Plan to Address Aquatic Wild Meat Harvests in West Africa* adopted under Resolution 14.15. Resolution 11.31 (Rev.COP15) *Illegal and Unsustainable Taking of Migratory Species* continues to address the ongoing threat of overexploitation of migratory species, including marine turtles.

19. Marine pollution was addressed through Resolution 15.2 *Marine Pollution* and Decisions 15.42-15.44, which call for the identification of high-risk regions for migratory species and collaboration with mechanisms established under the Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement).

20. In addition, Decisions 15.45-15.47 address the impacts of anthropogenic underwater noise on migratory species and provide for continued work on mitigation measures in line with Resolution 12.14 *Adverse Impacts of Anthropogenic Noise on Cetaceans and Other Migratory Species*.

Implications for Marine Turtle Conservation

21. For marine turtles, the resolutions and decisions adopted at CMS COP15 represent a significant strengthening of the CMS policy framework. They demonstrate the increasing emphasis within CMS on integrated and ecosystem-based approaches to marine conservation, recognising that the effective protection of marine turtles depends on addressing both species-specific threats and the health and connectivity of the wider marine environment.

22. Many of these outcomes provide opportunities for enhanced collaboration between CMS and the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU and support coordinated conservation action throughout the migratory range of marine turtles, encompassing nesting beaches, foraging grounds, migratory corridors and oceanic habitats.