

INTERNATIONAL SEA TURTLE SOCIETY



Wednesday, April 30, 2014

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Presidente Enrique Peña Nieto
President of Mexico
Los Pinos
Mexico City
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Dear Mr. President Peña Nieto,

I write on behalf of the members of the International Sea Turtle Society (ISTS) attending the 34th Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation, held in New Orleans, Louisiana USA from 10-17 April, 2014. The symposium is a unique event that in this occasion drew over 700 participants from more than 70 countries around the world, from across disciplines and cultures to a common interest and objective: the conservation of sea turtles and their environment. The Symposium encourages discussion, debate, and the sharing of knowledge, research techniques and lessons in conservation to address questions on the biology and conservation of sea turtles and their habitats.

Besides the regular sessions normally held at past Symposia, this year it featured a special session on Collaborative Fisheries and on the Biology and Conservation of Sea Turtles in the Gulf of Mexico and on the eastern US Seaboard. Among the topics included in the program were marine turtle ecological interactions, linkages among scientists, coastal communities, turtles, humans, consumptive and non-consumptive use, collaborative research, community-based conservation, policy-makers and managers.

During the plenary session, the ISTS adopted the attached resolution on the urgent need to end the high incidental mortality and strandings of endangered North Pacific loggerhead sea turtles in fisheries in the Gulf of Ulloa in Baja California Sur, Mexico.

For nearly a decade, sea turtle and fishery scientists in Mexico have documented high levels of loggerhead sea turtle strandings on beaches in Baja California Sur. Scientists believe that Baja California Sur has the highest concentration of sea turtle strandings anywhere in the world. Here Mexican fishermen using gillnets and longlines to target halibut and shark overlap with key loggerhead sea turtle feeding grounds.

Last year in a single two-month period, which corresponded with the height of the fishing season, a total of 705 loggerhead turtles were found dead along the along a 40-kilometer stretch of beach in the Gulf of Ulloa, a number which represents only a fraction of the total dead during the year in just this

area. While the 2013 mortality level was unprecedented, loggerhead stranding rates and overall levels at the Gulf of Ulloa have fluctuated at extremely high and unsustainable rates since at least 1996.

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Loggerhead sea turtles in the North Pacific Ocean are listed as endangered under both Mexican and U.S. law, but bycatch and mortality in commercial fisheries continues to threaten their existence. Mexico and the United States have required its fishermen to adopt sea turtle bycatch prevention measures, including closing high-risk fishing areas, in many commercial fisheries. But Mexico has not yet taken similar action to curb loggerhead bycatch in the Gulf of Ulloa.

We recognize that the government of Mexico has prioritized protection of loggerheads and other sea turtle species dating back to the 1960s, so we have no doubt that the loggerhead bycatch problem in the Gulf of Ulloa can be remedied in a way that benefits marine conservation as well as preserving the livelihood of fishing communities.

Regional cooperation and collaboration in sea turtle conservation are cornerstones of international efforts to safeguard these endangered species. The interest and support of Mexico and the U.S. in ensuring that sea turtles are adequately protected within its waters will be a valuable contribution.

I thank you in advance for your attention to this important matter and would be pleased to answer any questions that you might have.

With best wishes,



Roldán A. Valverde
President
International Sea Turtle Society

cc:

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