



RESOLUTION URGING THE REPUBLIC OF MEXICO TO END HIGH BYCATCH MORTALITY AND STRANDINGS OF NORTH PACIFIC LOGGERHEAD SEA TURTLES IN BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR, MEXICO

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Recalling that the Republic of Mexico has worked on the conservation of sea turtles dating back to the 1960s when the government set up sea turtle camps to protect and monitor nesting beaches; and

Remembering that in the 1970s and 1980s Mexico created 17 sea turtle reserves, in 1990 decreed a total ban on capture and use of sea turtles and their eggs, and in 1992 joined CITES to comply with the international ban on trade; and

Further remembering that in 2000 Mexico joined the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles; and in 2006 elevated the trade ban into law prohibiting the use of turtles for subsistence purposes; and in 2013 established rules to protect sea turtle nesting habitats; and

Acknowledging that there are nine loggerhead populations in the world, all of which are considered endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature; and

Recognizing that the government of Mexico lists the loggerhead as “in danger of extinction”; and

Acknowledging that the government of the United States officially classifies the North Pacific Ocean loggerhead as “endangered” under the Endangered Species Act; and

Knowing that North Pacific loggerhead nesting populations declined by 80 percent in the two decades of the 1990s and 2000s and are at a high risk of extinction; and

Understanding that during their life cycle North Pacific loggerheads travel some 7,500 miles each way while migrating

from their nesting grounds in Japan to the western coasts of Mexico and the U.S. and then back again to nest; and

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Remembering that the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles is one of several legally binding international and regional accords to which the United States and Mexico are each a Party that require measures to reduce bycatch, protect habitat, and avoid direct capture of loggerheads and other sea turtles; and

Aware that the Gulf of Ulloa in Baja California Sur, Mexico, has been identified as a key juvenile foraging area for North Pacific loggerheads due to persistent oceanographic features that aggregate pelagic red crabs among other prey; and

Concerned that North Pacific loggerheads die in the thousands every year as the result of incidental capture by fishing nets and hooks in the Gulf of Ulloa; and

Troubled that each year the Mexican gillnet and longline fisheries for halibut, shark and other finfish that operates off the southern Baja California peninsula captures and kills as bycatch thousands of endangered loggerheads; and

Alarmed that along a 40-kilometer index beach in a single two-month period in 2013, which corresponded with the height of the fishing season, 705 loggerhead turtles were found dead along the shores of the Gulf of Ulloa a number which represents only a fraction of the total dead during the year in just this area; and

Troubled that 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; and

Recalling that beginning in the 1990s, scientists and other concerned citizens began to collaborate with local fishermen and the Mexican government to address the bycatch issue, to explore viable fisheries options and to share the results; and

Recognizing that the collaboration – with the support of the local fishing communities - resulted in proposed fishing gear modifications and area limits for fishing boats that would protect sea turtles and maintain fishing; and

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Remembering that a broad and successful outreach campaign was conducted to educate the public through festivals and murals; it also promoted tourism and established international exchanges between fishers and other concerned citizens in Baja California Sur, Hawaii, and Japan; and

Further recalling that due to the concern for the gravity of the loggerhead bycatch the Mexican Congress requested that the Environment Ministry and Fishery Commission of the government implement a refuge area, a fisheries management plan and more fishery surveillance in the Gulf of Ulloa; and

Recognizing that INAPESCA published a study in October 2012 that acknowledged that "the available information on the incidental capture of sea turtles in the region known as the Gulf of Ulloa in the peninsula of Baja California Sur indicates that immediate action is necessary in the modification of fishing gear used by the artisanal fleet to avoid bycatch without affecting fisheries production"; and

Remembering that the IUCN Marine Turtle Specialist Group (MTSG) sent a letter in March 2013 to Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto (EPN) to warn him that the incidental mortality and bycatch rate for loggerhead sea turtles along the coast of the northwestern state of Baja California Sur is among the highest documented worldwide (WALLACE); and

Aware that in January 2013, the United States Department of Commerce "identified" Mexico for its failure to address the problem of loggerhead bycatch in the Gulf of Ulloa under the Protected Living Marine Resources statute of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Reauthorization Act, that requires the United States to formally investigate, certify and sanction nations that fail to adopt bycatch measures comparable to U.S. protections; and

Understanding that the governments of the United States and Mexico are evaluating the loggerhead mortality problem and the United States must make a determination on whether to certify the fishery by January 2015; and

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Additionally aware that in April 2013 U.S. conservation groups formally requested U.S. to apply trade sanctions against Mexico to stop the country's massive loggerhead sea turtle bycatch; and

Recalling that thirteen U.S. Congress members sent a letter in December 2013 to the U.S. Department of Commerce and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) requesting an update on the actions of the Mexican government regarding the protection of loggerheads from incidental capture in the Gulf of Ulloa fishery; and

Disturbed that the recent report from Procuraduría Federal Environmental Protection (PROFEPA) contradicts consensus of the broader scientific community and findings over the past two decades that fishing gear poses a significant threat to loggerheads in the waters around Baja California;

The International Sea Turtle Society, attending the 34th International Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation in New Orleans, Louisiana USA from April 10 to 17, 2014, requests that the:

1. Fisheries authorities of the Government of Mexico act immediately to end the high rates of bycatch mortality and strandings of endangered North Pacific loggerhead sea turtles in gillnet and longline fisheries in the Gulf of Ulloa in Baja California Sur.
2. Fisheries authorities of the Government of Mexico enforce and strengthen current fishing regulations in the Gulf of Ulloa, implement a sustainable fishery management plan, and also offer transitional support and capacity building to ensure fisher livelihoods are maintained.

3. Governments of Mexico and the United States protect the North Pacific loggerhead population from further decline and possible extinction by implementing and enforcing existing and additional sea turtle bycatch prevention regulations in both nation's waters and supporting similar actions in international waters and on the High Seas.

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