

Oceania's Implementation of the Convention on Migratory Species

Report to Standing Committee 32

8 – 9 November 2007

Oceania Region - Parties

Australia (1 September 1991)
Cook Islands (31 August 2006)
New Zealand (1 October 2000)
Philippines (1 February 1994)
Samoa (1 November 2005)

Country Reports

Australia

Cetaceans

MoU for the Conservation of Cetaceans and their Habitats in the Pacific Islands Region

The MoU came into effect in September 2006 with nine initial signatories, including Australia. Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands signed the MOU on 6 March 2007 and at least two other Pacific Island countries expect to sign in the near future. The first meeting of Signatories was held in Apia, Samoa from 5-10 March 2007, along with an Interactions workshop hosted by Australia and a review meeting of the 2003-2007 South Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP) Whale and Dolphin Action Plan (WDAP). Australia provided funding assistance of A\$105,000 to CMS/SPREP towards hosting of these meetings. The new WDAP (2007-2012) is expected to become the implementation plan of the MOU. Australia continues to support cetacean conservation initiatives in the region and is providing support to the Melanesian Cetacean Conservation Capacity Building Workshop in Papua New Guinea in November 2007 and will trial an innovative mitigation technique in Samoa to reduce cetacean depredation in 2008.

To mark the International Year of the Dolphin 2007, the Australian Government has launched a website (www.environment.gov.au/coasts/species/cetaceans/dolphin-year-2007.html) and developed a teachers' toolkit to guide teachers to organise dolphin related activities for school children. The website has been linked to the CMS International Year of the Dolphin website.

Conservation Status of Small Cetaceans in the Oceania Region

The 14th Scientific Council, (Bonn, March 2007), endorsed the proposed inclusion in Appendix II of the regional populations of five small cetacean species exploited in drive hunts in the Solomon Islands. Australia commented that more research was needed to determine the migratory status of these species before it could endorse the

proposal. Australia supports research to estimate population abundance of all migratory Oceania small cetacean species.

Marine Turtles

Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles and their Habitats of the Indian Ocean and South East Asia (IOSEA MoU):

The Australian Government continues to provide financial support for the Secretariat of the IOSEA MoU, this year contributing AUD\$80,000 to holding meetings and promotion of on-ground activities. A new on-line reporting tool is being trialled for Australia's national report.

Memorandum of Understanding for the Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles and their habitats of the Pacific Ocean

Australia has deposited A\$35K into a CMS trust fund to support the development of a Pacific Turtles MoU encompassing all Pacific Rim countries that are range states.

Dugong

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the Conservation and Management of Dugongs and their Habitats throughout their Range

An MoU for the conservation of the dugong and its habitats has been developed along with a Conservation and Management Plan (CMP). These documents were distributed by the CMS Secretariat to Range States in October 2006 for final comments and/or notification of endorsement. Between 28-31 October 2007, the United Arab Emirates hosted a meeting for Range States to become signatories to the MoU, and held a technical workshop to discuss the implementation of the CMP. Australia committed AUD\$150,000 towards the costs of this meeting.

Migratory Sharks

Global Sharks Instrument

A Meeting to Identify and Elaborate an Option for International Cooperation on Migratory Sharks is to be held in Mahe, Seychelles, from 11-13 December 2007. Australia has contributed A\$75k to encourage participation by range states of the three CMS listed sharks, particularly among developing countries which are also shark fishing countries. Additionally, Australia has pledged A\$50k to support attendance of an Earth Negotiations Bulletin reporting team in order to generate interest in the conservation of migratory sharks through a global sharks instrument.

Albatrosses and Petrels

The Second Meeting of the Parties (MoP2) to the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrel (ACAP) was held in New Zealand from 13-17 November 2006. An interim Secretariat has been established and is operating independently, replacing the previous interim Secretariat provided by Australia. The text of a Headquarters Agreement between the Secretariat and Australia was concluded at the 2nd Meeting of the Parties and, once ratified, will establish a permanent Secretariat, probably during 2008.

Australia attended the ACAP Advisory Committee meeting in Chile from 16-22 June 2007. The Advisory Committee reviewed its 2007-2009 work plan, a prominent element of which requires ACAP to engage with Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) in providing expert advice and encouragement to reduce and

avoid seabird bycatch. Australia has worked with other ACAP Parties to present proposals for mitigating seabird bycatch to RFMOs; however, with the exception of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), RFMOs are yet to adopt effective mitigation measures and at-sea mortality of albatrosses and petrels on longline and trawl fishing gear remains unsustainably high.

Domestically, Australia conducted a review of the implementation of its Threat Abatement Plan for the incidental catch of seabirds during longline fishing operations. While longline fisheries remain a threat, the review noted encouraging evidence of declining seabird bycatch in Australian fisheries. A National Recovery Plan for Albatrosses and Giant Petrels, considering actions to address land and marine based threats to conservation of those species, is currently under review.

East Asian – Australasian Flyway (EA-A) Partnership Launched

On 6 November 2006 the Partnership for the Conservation of Migratory Waterbirds and the Sustainable Use of their Habitats in the East Asian – Australasian Flyway was launched in Bogor, Indonesia, and the first meeting of partners was held. The CMS Secretariat took part in negotiating the Partnership and substantial progress has been made in finalising an implementation strategy and developing a work plan for 2007. A CMS instrument is currently being developed for the Central Asian Flyway and it will be important to establish close coordination and communication between the two Flyway Secretariats as several countries are traversed by both flyways. Australia provides interim secretariat for the EA-A Partnership and continues to lead in its development and implementation.

New Zealand

Cetaceans

After working closely with Samoa and Australia in finalising the draft of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the Conservation of Cetaceans and their Habitats in the Pacific Islands Region, New Zealand signed the MOU when it was opened for signature at the SPREP Annual Meeting in September 2006. The MoU now has eleven signatories and covers a vast area of the Pacific Islands region. New Zealand also welcomes the decision of the Cook Islands to join Samoa as Pacific Island members of CMS.

The interest in the conservation of cetaceans in the region has been heightened by concerns that the proposed take of humpback whales in the Japanese research programme, JARPA II, may have a significant impact on small Pacific Island populations that remain endangered despite decades of protection.

New Zealand supports the inclusion of the MoU for the Conservation of Cetaceans and their Habitats in the Pacific Islands Region in the core budget of CMS, and notes the importance of a successful CMS/SPREP partnership to implement the MoU, in particular the need to finalise administration and resource coordination arrangements.

As part of its contribution towards implementation of the MoU, New Zealand has undertaken a number of activities since the last meeting of the Standing Committee.

In association with SPREP and a range of government and non-government sponsors, including NZAID, Department of the Environment and Water Resources (Australia), and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (USA), New Zealand organised two workshops for Pacific Island participants in Auckland from the 25 September to 6 October 2006. The workshops provided significant upskilling and capacity-building opportunities for participants from eleven Pacific Island countries.

The first was a capacity-building workshop in cetacean research and management. Dr William Perrin, of the CMS Scientific Council, provided guidance in its organisation, and was one of the lead trainers.

The second workshop provided training in the management of cetacean strandings in the Pacific Islands region, and also provided a framework to facilitate the implementation of the Action Plan that will accompany the MoU.

New Zealand is also directly supporting a two-year programme of training and capacity-building in cetacean research in Tuvalu. A full-time coordinator has been appointed, one field season has been completed, and plans are being finalised for a further field season shortly. Four delegates from Tuvalu attended the Auckland workshops held a year ago.

A further commitment for 2008 is to foster the development of sustainable whale-watching in the region through a visit to New Zealand by six Pacific Island delegations. Participants will experience four successful whale-watch operations and meet scientists, tourism and business advisors and officials. The objective of the visit will be to encourage, promote and support the development of sustainable, well-managed whale-watching businesses in Pacific Island countries through a New Zealand study tour.

New Zealand participated in the first Meeting of Parties to the MoU, held in Apia, Samoa in March 2007, and wishes to express its gratitude to SPREP, the CMS Secretariat and the Government of Samoa for organising and hosting the meeting, which New Zealand regarded as very successful. We look forward to the Second Meeting of Parties and continuing progress with the MoU.

Migratory sharks

New Zealand is an active participant in the working group established to develop a conservation instrument for migratory sharks under CMS, and will send a shark specialist to the Seychelles meeting in December 2007.

New Zealand has implemented protection for great white sharks in domestic waters and from New Zealand fishing vessels on the high seas. New Zealand is moving towards protection of whale sharks in New Zealand waters. As part of the development of a National Plan of Action on the Management and Conservation of Sharks and Rays, New Zealand will consider protection for basking sharks.

New Zealand is also bound by Conservation and Management Measure 2006-05 of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (available at www.wcpfc.int). The measure applies to sharks caught in association with fisheries managed under the WCPFC Convention and requires members to develop national plans of actions for

sharks which should, among other things, contain measures to minimise waste and discards from shark catches and encourage the release of live sharks. Unless alternative measures are in place to manage shark catches sustainably within areas of national jurisdiction, the measure also requires members to take steps necessary to require their fishers to fully utilise any retained catch of sharks and either have on board fins that total no more than 5% of the weight of sharks on board or alternatively require fishers to land sharks with their fins attached. The measure applies in its initial stage to vessels greater than 24m in overall length. Catch limits for sharks are in place within New Zealand national waters, but the measure will also be applied to New Zealand-flagged large vessels operating on the high seas and will most likely require sharks to be landed with fins attached as the most effective of the options.

New Zealand, in collaboration with scientists from the US, is continuing to invest in research on the movement of white sharks within the EEZ, and between NZ and other range states in the SW Pacific. Initial results indicate potentially seasonal migration of subadult and adult white sharks to the islands of the southwest Pacific (New Caledonia, Vanuatu) coincident with the seasonal migration of humpback whales to these waters. Return migration to New Zealand has not been demonstrated. It is planned to extend this research to include whale sharks, basking sharks and devil rays (*Mobula japonica*) in spring/summer 2007/08.

Albatrosses and Petrels

New Zealand continues to work on a number of projects to mitigate the by-catch of seabirds during fishing operations and to protect seabird breeding sites from land-based threats. At the 2nd ACAP Advisory Committee meeting in Brazil between 5-8 June 2006, New Zealand reported on a number of programmes that will address the ACAP Action Plan, including:

- the review of New Zealand's National Plan of Action - Seabirds;
- the national observer programme to investigate the nature and extent of seabird bycatch in New Zealand fisheries, including bycatch of ACAP species;
- population and distributional studies of selected seabird species, with specific reference to the effects of fisheries bycatch;
- investigation of subantarctic seabird foraging patterns with a view to using this information in the development of marine protected areas;
- predator control operations at priority island breeding sites for albatrosses and petrels; and
- implementation of seabird-related conservation and management measures for RFMOs to which New Zealand belongs or intends to join.

The New Zealand Government hosted the second session of the Meeting of the Parties to ACAP in Christchurch from 13 to 17 November 2006.

At the third ACAP Advisory Committee meeting in June 2007, New Zealand reported on continued progress made by the programmes above, as well as development of measures to reduce seabird bycatch in New Zealand fisheries. We undertook to progress the ACAP work programme by completing species assessments for seabirds that breed in New Zealand, and a review of trawl fishery mitigation measures. This review will also identify research priorities in this area, for consideration at the fourth ACAP Advisory Committee meeting in South Africa in 2008.

In addition to the initiatives reported on at ACAP, New Zealand has undertaken risk assessments for seabird - fisheries interactions to inform the development of domestic fisheries management measures, and implemented new regulations for mitigation measures to reduce seabird bycatch in surface longline fisheries.

Samoa

Cetaceans

Samoa signed the *Memorandum of Understanding for the Conservation of Cetaceans and their Habitats in the Pacific Islands Region* in September 2006. Samoa continues to direct efforts toward the conservation of whale, dolphin and marine turtle species in Samoan waters through the implementation of the provisions of the Whales and Dolphin Action Plan (Annex 2 of the MoU).

Research and Monitoring – Cetaceans and Turtles

Samoa is conducting surveys to assess the status (diversity, density and migration) of whales and dolphins in domestic waters. Three such surveys have been completed, and a fourth commenced in September of this year. A study on cetacean interaction with longline gear was also conducted and will continue when funds become available. A Whales and Dolphin Watching feasibility survey has just been completed with a focus on determining the practicality of carrying out eco-tourism operations in Samoa. Information is also being collected on whale and dolphin sightings from dive tour operators, commercial fishers, aircraft pilots, and inter-island ferry operators. Finally, in collaboration with American Samoa, information on transboundary species is being gathered.

Samoa continues to conduct annual marine turtle nesting surveys at key sites around the country, and continues to respond to reports regarding stranded an/or entangled marine turtles through ‘tag and release’ activities.

Education and Public Awareness– Cetaceans and Turtles

In relation to education and public awareness, Samoa continues to raise public awareness of cetaceans and marine turtle conservation through workshops, public presentations, and in schools around the country, as well as providing technical advice when required. Information about these marine species is disseminated through various media, including information sheets and posters, articles in local newspapers, and is also available on the Ministry’s website.

Capacity Building– Cetaceans and Turtles

Samoa urgently needs to build capacity to effectively conserve cetaceans and marine turtles, and to this end participated in a number of specialised cetacean training exercises in the region including stranding management, research methodologies, necropsy and biopsy. In addition to surveys, strandings and entanglements provide valuable opportunities for data collection and as such, Samoa continues to respond to stranding incidents of cetaceans and marine turtles around the country.

International Cooperation

Samoa continues to benefit from funding and technical assistance provided by international organisations and experts, and maintains a close collaborative working relationship with these organisations and experts.

Collaboration with National Agencies

Through the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Samoa continues to foster collaborative relationships with other government and non-government organisations on issues relating to cetaceans and marine turtles in domestic waters. Achievements arising from these collaborative relationships include: (i) the establishment of a National Stranding Committee to facilitate the collection and exchange of information on stranded cetaceans and marine turtles; and (ii) development of an Action Plan for Marine Mammal Strandings.

Protection of Migratory Species

Samoa is in the process of comparing information with American Samoa on cetacean occurrence and migration, and this initiative will lead to development of an MoU to address protection of transboundary species.

National Legislation

A set of Marine Wildlife Regulations has been developed to protect whales, dolphins, marine turtles and sharks found in Samoan waters.

Other biodiversity-related international instruments that complement the CMS

As a Party to CITES, Samoa continues to respond to related enquiries and provision of advice pertaining to export of marine species from Samoa.

Philippines

Nil input at time of submission of Oceania Report.

Cook Islands

Nil input at time of submission of Oceania Report.