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**PROPOSAL FOR THE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF SEA
TURTLES**

**WCPFC4-2007/DP13
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Proposal by the United States

The Commission for the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean;

In accordance with the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean:

Recognizing the ecological and cultural significance of all species of sea turtles in the western and central Pacific Ocean (WCPO);

Considering the adverse effects of fishing for highly migratory fish stocks on some populations of sea turtles in the WCPO through capture and mortality;

Recalling that the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) endorsed *Guidelines to Reduce Sea Turtle Mortality in Fishing Operations* at its twenty-sixth Session of the Committee on Fisheries, held in March 2005, and recommended their implementation by regional fisheries bodies and management organizations;

Noting that recent international scientific studies using large circle hooks in shallow-set pelagic longline fishing show when compared to conventional hooks, significantly lower sea turtle catch rates without undue adverse effects on catch rates of target species;

Further noting that scientific studies indicate circle hooks' further mitigative effects for sea turtles and other incidentally caught species in terms of post-release mortality, as the hooking locations tend to be such that resultant injuries are less severe than with conventional hooks;

Acknowledging that relatively simple proactive and reactive efforts on the part of fishermen can serve to both avoid sea turtle interactions and minimize the adverse consequences of such interactions when they occur;

Recognizing that the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) adopted, at its 75th meeting, a *Resolution to Mitigate the Impact of Tuna Fishing Vessels on Sea Turtles* that includes mandatory provisions to apply to purse seine and longline vessels;

Recalling Article 22 of the Convention, which provides for cooperation with other organizations, particularly the IATTC, with a view to avoiding duplication of, and achieving consistency in, conservation and management measures;

Adopts, in accordance with Articles 5 and 10 of the Convention, that:

1. Commission Members, Cooperating non-Members and participating Territories (CCMs) shall implement the FAO Guidelines to reduce the bycatch, injury, and mortality of sea turtles in fishing operations and to ensure the safe handling of all captured sea turtles, in order to improve their survival.
2. Beginning in 2008, CCMs shall report to the Commission in Part 2 of their annual reports the progress of implementation of the FAO Guidelines, including information collected on interactions with sea turtles in fisheries managed under the Convention.
3. All data collected by the WCPFC Regional Observer Program (ROP), shall be reported to the Commission as provided in paragraph 2 above or as agreed to under other Commission data collection provisions.
4. CCMs shall require fishermen on vessels targeting species covered by the Convention to bring aboard, if practicable, any comatose or inactive hard-shell sea turtle as soon as possible and foster recovery, including resuscitation, before returning it to the water. Fishermen shall be aware of and use proper mitigation and handling techniques, as described in WCPFC guidelines to be developed and provided by the Secretariat.
5. CCMs with purse seine vessels that fish for target species covered by the Convention shall:
 - a. Ensure that operators of such vessels, while fishing in the Convention Area:
 - i. To the extent practicable, avoid encirclement of sea turtles. If a sea turtle is encircled or entangled, take practicable measures to safely release the turtle(s) before retrieving the net, including the deployment of a speedboat to rescue or remove the turtle from the direct area of operation.
 - ii. Monitor fish aggregating devices (FADs) for the entanglement of sea turtles and record any such entanglements, including the apparent fate of the turtles, and report all such observations on the relevant catch reports or to the appropriate CCM authority.
 - iii. To the extent practicable, release all sea turtles observed entangled in FADs or other fishing gear.

- iv. If a sea turtle is entangled in the net, stop net roll as soon as the turtle comes out of the water, and disentangle the turtle before resuming the net roll without injuring it, and to the extent practicable, assist the recovery of the turtle before returning it to the water.
 - v. Carry and employ dip nets, when appropriate, to handle turtles.
- b. Provide the monitoring results of paragraph 5(a)(ii) to the Commission as part of the reporting requirement of paragraph 2.
 - c. Provide to the Commission the results of any research related to the development of modified FAD designs to reduce sea turtle entanglement and take measures to encourage the use of designs found to be successful at such reduction.
6. CCMs with longline vessels that fish for target species covered by the Convention shall ensure that the operators of all such longline vessels carry and use line cutters and de-hookers to handle and promptly release sea turtles caught or entangled in accordance with WCPFC guidelines that are to be developed and provided by the Secretariat. Operators of such vessels shall also, where appropriate, be required to carry and use dip-nets in accordance with these WCPFC guidelines.
7. CCMs with longline vessels that fish for swordfish in a shallow-set manner¹ shall:
- a. Ensure that the operators of such vessels, while in the Convention Area:
 - i. Use only large circle hooks, which are fishing hooks that are generally circular or oval in shape and originally designed and manufactured so that the point is turned perpendicularly back to the shank. These hooks shall have an offset not to exceed 10 degrees.
 - ii. Use only whole finfish for bait.
 - b. For the purpose of implementing paragraph 7, establish and enforce their own operational definitions of shallow-set swordfish longline fisheries and large circle hooks, ensuring that they are as enforceable as possible, and report these to the Commission in Part 2 of their annual reports.
 - c. The SC and TCC will annually review the information reported by CCMs. Where necessary an updated suite of mitigation measures, specifications for mitigation measures, or recommendations for application will then be provided to the Commission for its consideration and review.
8. CCMs with longline fisheries for other than shallow-set swordfish are urged to:

¹ “Shallow-set” fisheries are generally to be considered those in which the majority of hooks fish at a depth shallower than [100] meters; however, pursuant to paragraph 7(b) CCMs are to establish and enforce their own operational definitions.

- a. Undertake research trials of circle hooks in those longline fisheries.
- b. Report the results of these trials to the Scientific and the Technical and Compliance Committees, at least 60 days in advance of the annual meetings of these subsidiary bodies.
- c. The SC and TCC will analyze the results of the trials and recommend to CCMs additional mitigation measures, specifications for mitigation, and recommendations for application to the Commission for its consideration and review.

9. This measure authorizes the Secretariat to obligate resources available to the Special Requirements Fund to be used to assist developing State Members and Territories in implementing the FAO Guidelines to Reduce Sea Turtle Mortality.

10. The Commission urges CCMs to contribute to the Special Requirements Fund to support eligible members in their efforts to implement this measure, or to provide such support through bilateral arrangements.

11. The Commission will regularly consider additional mitigation measures for other longline fisheries based on advice from the Scientific Committee and Technical and Compliance Committee and on information provided by CCMs pursuant to paragraph 8.

12. The Secretariat, in coordination with interested CCMs, shall develop guidelines for the handling of sea turtles and distribute them to CCMs no later than June 30, 2008.