



Developing Best Handling & Release Practices for Sea Turtles for IATTC Fisheries

Melanie Hutchinson
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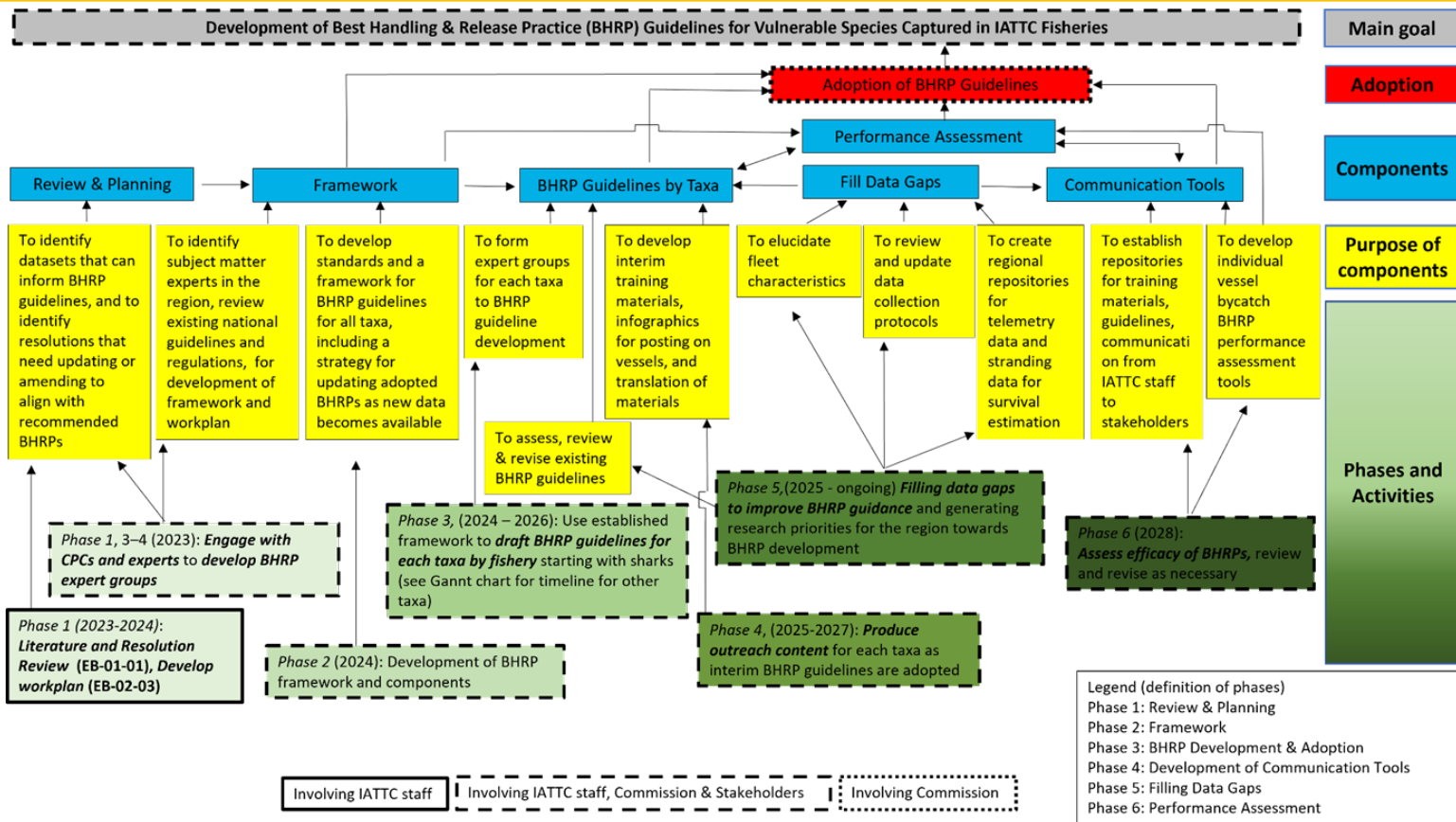
BHRP reduce mortality to incidental species

- IATTC Strategic Science Plan included the development of BHRP for all vulnerable species
- No bycatch mitigation measure is perfectly effective
- Post interaction the most effective method for reducing impacts and mortality are through careful handling and release
- Relatively simple behavioral / procedural changes with measurable impacts on survival
- Several IATTC Resolutions for vulnerable species call for the use of BHRP



BHRP are the 'low hanging fruit' of conservation strategies

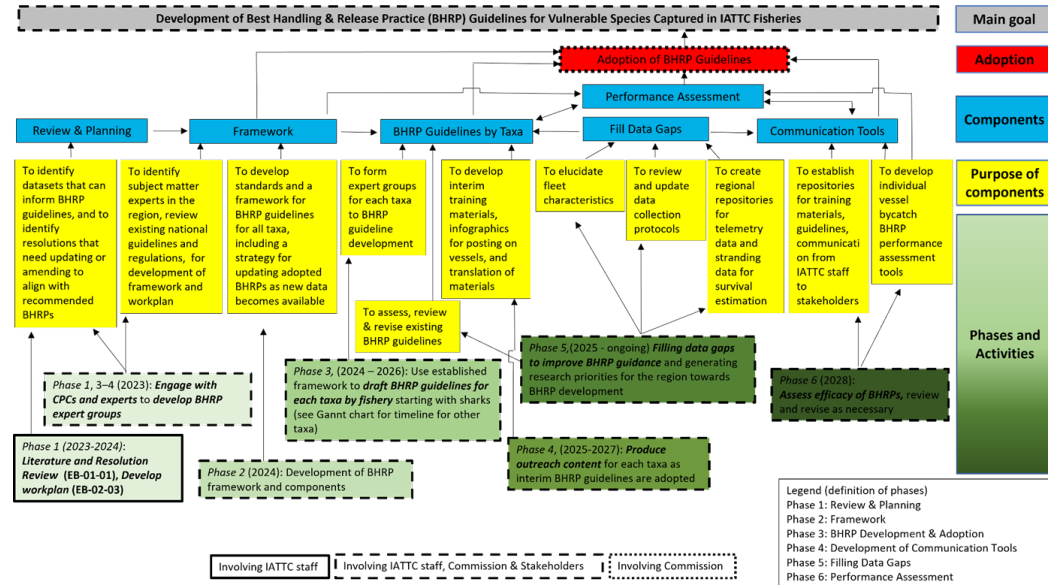
Workplan for BHRP guideline development (EB-02-03)



Workplan for BHRP guideline development (EB-02-03)

6 Components:

1. Review & planning (2023 EB-01-01)
2. BHRP Framework (2024 EB-02-03)
3. Guideline development for each taxa by fishery
4. Development of training & education materials
5. Filling data & research gaps
6. Performance assessment



BHRP VULNERABLE SPECIES WORKPLAN OVERVIEW (EB-02-03)

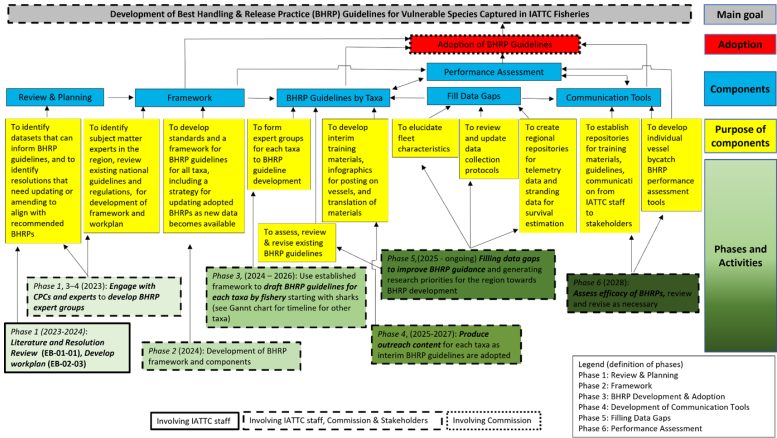


INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION
ECOSYSTEMS AND BYCATCH WORKING GROUP
2ND MEETING
La Jolla, California (USA)
06-07 June 2024

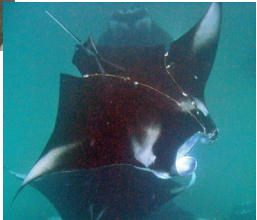
EB-02-03

WORKPLAN TOWARDS THE ADOPTION OF BEST HANDLING AND RELEASE PRACTICES FOR VULNERABLE SPECIES IN IATTC FISHERIES

Melanie Hutchinson and Jon Lopez



2024



2025



2026

EBWG-2 (2024) Recommendations

The EBWG recommends that:

1.1. A second circle hook workshop be conducted that will fulfill the mandate of paragraph 3(d)(i) of Res. C-19-04.

1.2. Advice be provided by the workshop on the impacts of fishing operations on the form and structure (i.e., longevity and integrity) of circle hooks of various sizes and from different manufacturers.

1.3. The workshop include development of a third mitigation measure as described in Paragraph 3(d)(iii) of C-19-04 for small coastal multi-species vessel fleets as well as best handling and release practices for sea turtles.

Resolution C-19-04

INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION

94TH MEETING

Bilbao, Spain
22-26 July 2019

RESOLUTION C-19-04

RESOLUTION TO MITIGATE IMPACTS ON SEA TURTLES

1. IATTC Members and Cooperating Non-Members (“CPCs”) shall:

a. Require owners/operators/vessel crew on vessels targeting species covered by the Convention to promptly **release, in a manner that causes the least harm** to the extent practicable, all sea turtles, without compromising the safety of any persons.

b. Ensure that vessel operators and/or at least one crew member on board of vessels targeting species covered by the Convention in fisheries that have reported sea turtle interactions, and particularly those without observers, **are trained in techniques for handling and release of sea turtles** to improve survival after release.

RESOLUTION C-19-04

RESOLUTION TO MITIGATE IMPACTS ON SEA TURTLES

2 & 3. CPCs with purse seine (2) & longline (3) vessels fishing for species covered by the IATTC in the Convention Area shall:

a. Require owners/operators of longline vessels to carry on board, and employ when appropriate, **safe-handling tools** for the safe release of sea turtles (e.g. de-hookers, line cutters, and dip nets).

b. Require that owners/operators/vessel crew of longline vessels take all reasonable steps, as appropriate, to ensure the safe release of any incidentally-caught sea turtles by **following handling and release guidelines in the Appendix, and consistent with the FAO "Best practices for sea turtle handling and release."**

Annex – Res. C-19-04 BHRP

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RESOLUTION C-19-04

RESOLUTION TO MITIGATE IMPACTS ON SEA TURTLES

GUIDELINES TO REDUCE SEA TURTLE MORTALITY IN FISHING OPERATIONS

- FAO (2009) BHRP follows the United States Government protocol for handling and releasing sea turtles & uses The list of United States Government-approved equipment for turtle handling and release.
- US Guidelines were updated in 2019

APPENDIX

Safe Handling and Release Guidelines for Sea Turtles

1. PURSE SEINE SAFE HANDLING AND RELEASE

- Whenever a sea turtle is sighted in the net, all reasonable efforts should be made to rescue the turtle before it becomes entangled in the net.
- If a turtle is entangled during net roll, the net should be hauled over the turntable to a height of about 2 meters, the main boom should be moved to starboard or to port (depending on the vessel's direction) and the net should be rolled back, so that the crew can release the turtle from the netting as soon as possible, and return it to the sea over the starboard or port side if it is active. Net roll should not start again until the turtle has been disentangled and released.
- If, in spite of the measures taken under paragraphs a and b of this section, a sea turtle is accidentally brought on board the vessel and is alive and active, or dead, the sea turtle should be released as quickly as practicable.
- If a turtle is brought aboard the vessel and is comatose or inactive, resuscitation should be attempted (paragraph 3).

2. LONGLINE SAFE HANDLING AND RELEASE

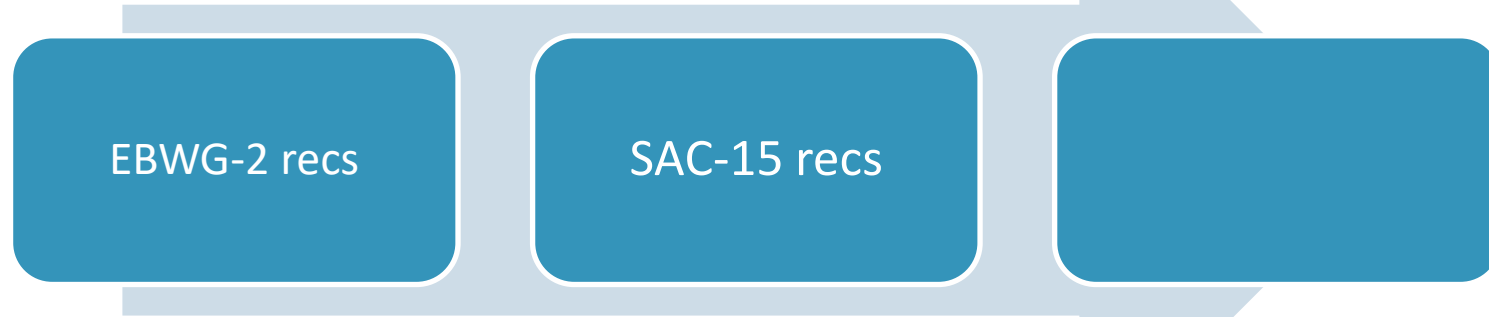
- When practicable, and when operator or crew on board are trained, comatose sea turtles should be brought on board immediately.
- If a sea turtle is too large or hooked in such a manner as to preclude safe boarding without causing further damage/injury to the turtle, line clippers should be used to clip the line and remove as much line as possible prior to releasing the turtle.
- If a sea turtle is observed to be hooked or entangled by longline gear during hauling operations, the vessel operator should immediately cease hauling operations until the turtle has been removed from the longline gear or brought on board the vessel.
- If hooked externally or hook is fully visible, hooks should be removed from sea turtles as quickly and carefully as possible. If a hook cannot be removed from a turtle (e.g., ingested or in roof of mouth), the line should be cut as close to the hook as possible.
- Live turtles should be returned to the sea after handling:
 - By putting the vessel engine in neutral gear so that the propeller is disengaged and the vessel is stopped, and releasing the turtle away from deployed gear; and
 - Observing that the turtle is safely away from the vessel before engaging the propeller and continuing operations.
- If the sea turtle brought aboard the vessel is comatose or inactive, resuscitation should be attempted (paragraph 3).

3. RESUSCITATION FOR A TURTLE ON BOARD

- When handling a sea turtle, attempts should be made to hold the animal by the shell, avoiding the head and neck region, and flippers.
- Strive to remove and/or disentangle any foreign items from the sea turtle, such as any plastic items, netting, or embedded hooks, etc.
- Placing the turtle on its bottom shell (plastron) so that the turtle is right side up and elevating its hindquarters at least 6 inches (15 cm) for a period of 4 up to 24 hours. The amount of the elevation depends on the size of the turtle; greater elevations are needed for larger turtles. Periodically, rock the turtle gently left to right and right to left by holding the outer edge of the shell (carapace) and lifting one side about 3 inches (8 cm) then alternate to the other side. Gently touch the eye and pinch the tail (reflex test) periodically to see if there is a response.



Sea turtle BHRP process (2024)



1. EBWG-2: Conduct a 2nd Circle Hook Workshop and Explore updating the longline BHRP guidelines
2. SAC-15: 'That a program of dialogue be established between scientific staff, managers, fleet managers, and captains of the tuna fleets of the CPCs, with respect to: ... (b) Implementation of new methods on best practices for release of bycatch species

Sea turtle BHRP process (2024)

EBWG-2
Recs

SAC-15

Memos. 0473-
410, 0610-410

COMISION INTERAMERICANA DEL ATUN TROPICAL (CIAT)
INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION (IATTC)

MEMORANDUM

26 September 2023
Ref.: 0473-410

To: Commissioners and Heads of Delegation
c.c.: Bolivia, Chile, Honduras, Indonesia, Liberia
From: Arnulfo Franco, Director
Re: Guidelines for best handling and release practices (BHRP)

A. As you may recall, the Permanent Working Group on Ecosystem and Bycatch (EBWG) at its first meeting and the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) at its 14th meeting ([IATTC-101-03](#)), both recognized the need to develop best handling and release practice (BHRP) guidelines for vulnerable bycatch species (seabirds, sea turtles, marine mammals, sharks and rays).

Accordingly, the SAC endorsed the EBWG recommendation that CPCs and other relevant stakeholders support the IATTC staff in a survey to gather details of national efforts or programs that can help elucidate post-release survival rates of vulnerable species captured in the various fisheries under the purview of the IATTC.

B. In accordance with the above, all CPCs are invited to:

1. Provide national BHRP guidelines
2. Provide existing PRS data
3. Identify/designate subject matter experts (SME)
4. Identify/designate industry representatives

Sea turtle BHRP process (2025)

INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION
ECOSYSTEM AND BYCATCH WORKING GROUP
3RD MEETING
La Jolla, California (USA)
26-27 May 2025

EB-03-05

BEST HANDLING AND RELEASE PRACTICES FOR SEA TURTLES CAPTURED IN IATTC FISHERIES

Melanie Hutchinson, Mariluz Parga, Marlon Roman, Jon Lopez

2nd Circle Hook
Workshop
(hook and line)

Review &
Consultation
(CPCs, SME)

BHRP (All
Fisheries)
EB-03-05

EBWG-03

INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION
2ND CIRCLE HOOK WORKSHOP

by videoconference
17-19 March 2025

DOCUMENT HKS-02-01

SEA TURTLE CIRCLE HOOKS AND BYCATCH MITIGATION WORKSHOP
BACKGROUND

‘That, as soon as possible, if necessary, to make recommendations regarding the updating of best practice guidelines for sea turtle handling and release practices for all fisheries under the competence of the Commission’.



Sea turtle BHRP process (2025)

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ECOSYSTEM AND BYCATCH WORKING GROUP

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Workshop
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BHRP (All
Fisheries)
EB-03-05

EBWG-03

1st IATTC
Workshop
for
Advancing
BHRP

INTER-AMERICAN TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION

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DOCUMENT HKS-02-01

**SEA TURTLE CIRCLE HOOKS AND BYCATCH MITIGATION WORKSHOP
BACKGROUND**





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662 MEETING(S)

08 Jul-11 Jul 2026



11th Joint IATTC-Northern
Committee Working Group Meeting
on PBF Management

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08 Jun-12 Jun 2026



17th Meeting of the Scientific
Advisory Committee

[INFO/DOCS](#)

05 Jun 2026



4th Meeting of the Ad Hoc Working
Group to Strengthen the Dialogue
among Scientists, Managers, and
other Stakeholders on MSE

[More information coming soon](#)

03 Jun-04 Jun 2026



10th Meeting of the Ad Hoc Working
Group on FADS

[More information coming soon](#)

01 Jun-02 Jun 2026



4th Meeting of the Permanent
Working Group on Ecosystem and
Bycatch

[More information coming soon](#)

20 May-21 May 2026



2nd Informal Consultation Meeting
between the Committee on
Administration and Finance (CAF)
and the Ad Hoc Working Group on
the Financial Strengthening of the
AIDCP

[More information coming soon](#)

PICAL TUNA COMMISSION
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MEETING

alifornia (USA)
May 2025

03-05

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Parga, Marlon Roman, Jon Lopez

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Workshop
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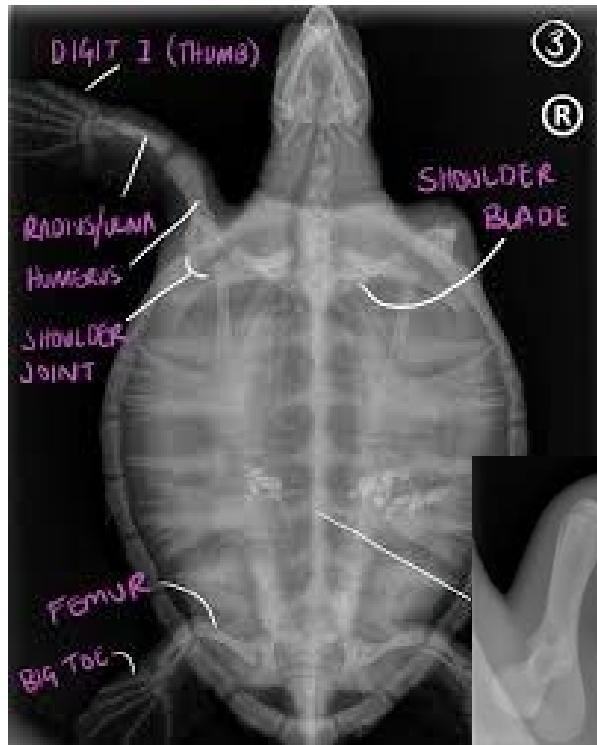
Foundations of BHRP Guideline Recommendations



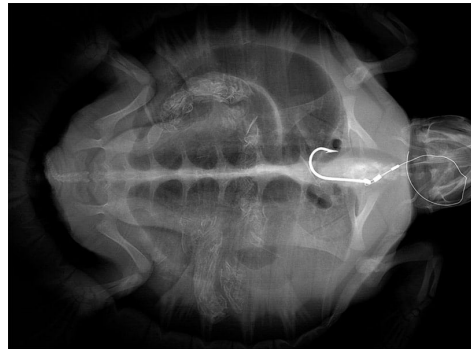
- High proportion of sea turtles are alive at haul-back -> using BHRP is imperative for reducing impacts on the population
- Many injuries recorded in stranding centers were due to poor handling, gear removal and release practices

From Blades et al. 2019. ESR. (Photo by E. Czuchnicki)

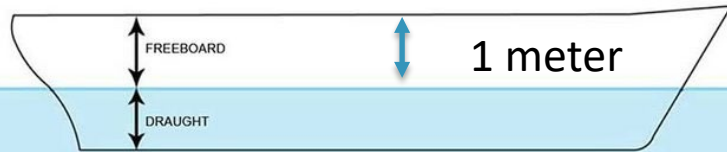
Foundations of BHRP Guideline Recommendations: Physiology



- Injuries to fragile bones and ligaments
- Improper boarding technique
- Hook removal
- Leaving trailing gear (intestinal plication and or amputation)



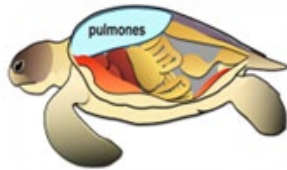
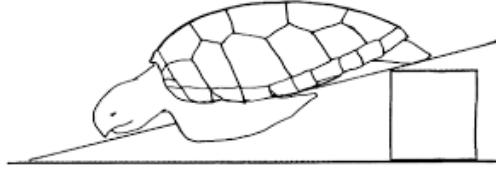
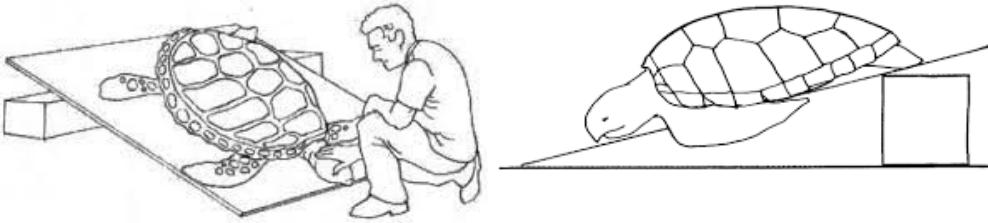
Bringing turtles onboard



- Fishers **MUST** bring them onboard by either supporting the body manually (freeboard < 1m) and picking it up by the carapace or by using some kind of net (freeboard > 1m).
- Never pick it up by the line it is captured on or entangled in.



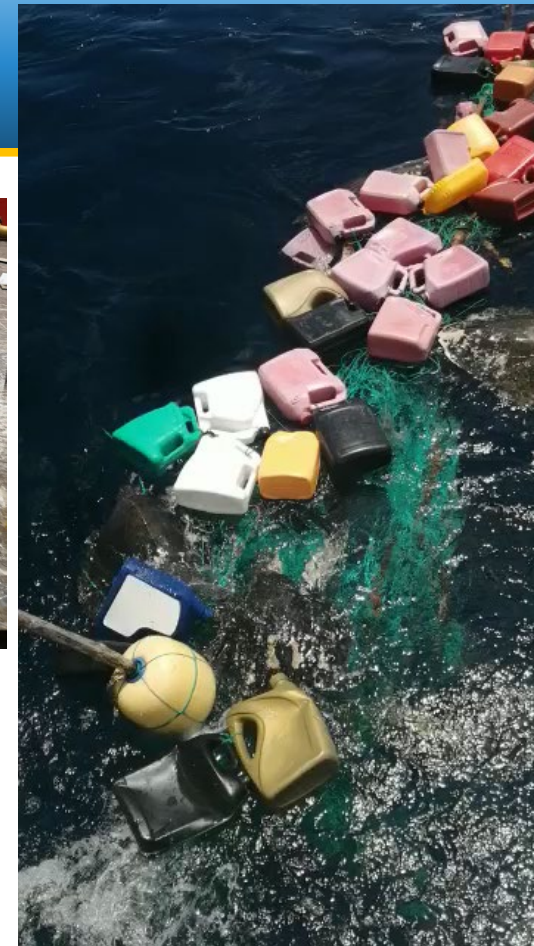
Resuscitation & Release Guidance



- Comatose sea turtles need time to recover on deck.
- Never place a sea turtle upside down - on their dorsal surface – this inhibits lung capacity
- Conducting a reflex test
- When and how to release a sea turtle

Concluding thoughts

- Outreach, education and training are essential components of the successful implementation of BHRP
- Workshops are opportunities for knowledge exchange



Training requirements

- Several IATTC Resolutions—including C-04-05 Rev 2, C-04-07 [C], and C-19-04—emphasize the importance of education and training in BHRPs.
- Resolution C-04-05 Rev 2 (paragraphs 8.b. and 8.c.) directs the IATTC staff to: *“educate fishermen through information dissemination activities, including distributing informational materials and organizing seminars on, inter alia, reducing bycatches of sea turtles and safe handling of incidentally caught sea turtles to improve their survivability.”*

https://www.iattc.org/en-US/Resources/Videos

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- ## Turtle identification ES

Learning to release Sea Turtles

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dehooker at a right angle to the shank

use the platina dehooker to start rotating the hook

Watch on YouTube

Resucitación de Tortugas - IATTC OFCF ES

Resucitación de Tortugas - IATTC OFCF
Ministerio de Ambiente y Desarrollo Sostenible

Watch on YouTube

Thank you!



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