

Meeting Report

2nd Meeting of the Pacific Leatherback Assessment Working Group



Town & Country Resort and Convention Center
San Diego, California
21-22 August 2012

Comisión Nacional de Areas Naturales Protegidas (CONANP -Mexico)
Fauna and Flora International (Nicaragua)
Marine Research Foundation (Malaysia)
Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (USA)
The State University of Papua (Indonesia)
University of Alabama at Birmingham (USA)
Southwestern Fisheries Science Center (USA)
The Oceanic Society (USA)



Meeting Summary:

The second meeting of the Pacific Leatherback Assessment Working Group (PLAWG) was co-chaired by Jeff Seminoff and Kyle Van Houtan through grant funding from NMFS SAIP (Stock Assessment Improvement Plan). The PLWAG 2 was a two-day meeting designed to pick up where we left off at the July 2011 meeting, with the large benefit of including key data holders and leatherback scientists that were not present at the initial gathering. The accomplished goals of PLAWG 2 were to: (1) compile the most up-to-date population status information on Pacific leatherbacks; (2) clarify data quality and identify significant data gaps; and (3) develop strategy for quantitative status assessments for eastern and western Pacific leatherbacks.

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Previous page, clockwise from top left—Pilcher, Jones, Tapilatu, Dutton, Sarti, Barragan, Eguchi, LeRoux, Benson, Allen, Van Houtan, Wallace, Seminoff, Tiwari, and Urteaga

Meeting participants

NOAA Participants

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Jeff Seminoff (SWFSC), jeffrey.seminoff@noaa.gov [JS]
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Non-NOAA Participants

Ana Barragan (CONANP, Mexico), abarragan@conanp.gob.mx [AB]
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Bryan Wallace (The Oceanic Society, USA), wallace@oceanicsociety.org [BW]

Pacific Leatherback Assessment Working Group

MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, 21 August 2012

MEETING CONTEXT

9:00 Welcome to PLAWG Meeting 2 - Introductions of meeting participants and Schedule overview

- Seminoff gives intro to himself and others give their own intro
- Lynn Evans is thanked for all of her help

9:30 Review of PLAWG 1 - Brief summaries of recent research findings relevant to leatherback assessment

- Seminoff clarified the role of the PLAWG group and the objectives of this meeting: to determine data gaps and data sets available so that the PLAWG can develop an assessment of the status of the leatherback turtle in the Pacific.
- Seminoff provided documents to PLAWG members that will be useful for this assessment process
- Goal of this meeting is not to figure out what model we will use for this assessment. More to find data gaps. Take home goal is to start the process of assessment
- Need to be sensitive to data holders.
- We need to help data holders write up papers where necessary.
- What is the strategy as we move forward?
- Are we adding any low hanging fruit of any signs of recovery? [SB]
- Would be great to add the number of animals lost to bycatch in the Pacific. What sort of data exists? Know where the threats are. [NP]
- Longlines, nets and trawls bycatch data will be out in a paper soon. [BW]
- Philippines document showing strandings of leatherbacks. Has hard copy not PDF. [NP]
- Will focus on threats again when KVH and TE discuss the assessment approaches
- Need to focus on the best monitoring data we have and that is the nesting beach data. Nesting data are a window between generations – shows us who is breeding but also about hatchling production [KVH]
- Forecast what is going to happen in the future and incorporate climate [KVH]

10:00 PLAWG 2 Goals - Discussion of NOAA sea turtle assessment mandates

- Critical habitat for leatherbacks identified off CA

- Incorporate the findings of this group into the request for proposals to PIRO(Pacific Islands Regional Office) or WPRFMC (Western Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Council) [NP]
- Dataset gaps can be identified and people can go back to their beaches and get this information for the next meeting [TE]
- Need to look at the sample sizes because they are small [NP]
- Assessing the data quality and reliability of the excel spreadsheet that was filled out for each country and nesting site within that country [BW]

2:15 Rick Tapilatu - Update on Papua Indonesia nesting beaches

- Bird's Head: eastern part of Indonesia
 1. Jamursba-Medi (17.9-km): 3 beaches (from west to east: Wembrak, Batu Rumah and Warmamed)
 2. Wermon
- Transportation is labor some
- Data collected
 - o Daily nest counts since 2004 at Wermon
 - o Daily nest counts since 2005 at Jamursba-Medi
 - o Sand and nest temperatures, periodic relocation and predator control program
- Since 2005 students and other workers from the State University of Papua (UNIPA) have been doing research on Jamursba-Medi and Wermon
- Socio-economic community program
 - o Agricultural sectors: cacao, coconut, pig/deer jerky
 - o Pig control
- Nesting count trends from 1984-2011 with 95% confidence intervals
 - o Trend -5.9% per year
 - o 1984-2011 (27 years) = 80.6% decline
 - o 1993-2011 (18 years) = 66.5% decline; WWF starts monitoring program
 - o 2005-2011 (6 years) – 30.5% decline; 2005 was the year UNIPA got involved
 - o Only have data for Warmon since 2003
 - o Do we have trend data per year for the different time periods (27, 18 or 6 years)? This could help if you have low confidence in the historically collected data [BW]
- Female count trends 2005-2011 with 95% confidence intervals
 - o Boreal (from Jamursba-Medi and Wermon, April-Sept): -6.4% per year
 - o Austral (from Jamursba-Medi and Wermon, Oct-Mar): -10.1% per year
- Additional information:
 - o Demographic & isotope
 - o Hatchling success
 - Hatcheries (2005-2010): ~80%
 - *In situ*: varies and range from 0 – 90%, average ~ 25%
 - Doomed nest: ~70%
 - o Hatchling production: being analyzed

- Sand nest temperature: being analyzed
- Sex ratio: being analyzed
- Threats
 - Direct take of leatherbacks (male and female): n = 29, June-Dec 2009 in Kei (south-west of Bird's Head); n = 135 between November 2003 – December 2007 in the same area ; direct take of nesting females at non-index beaches occurs but no quantitative data
 - Egg consumption: mostly in non-index beaches in Bird's Head and sporadic in Jamursba-Medi/Wermon
 - Feral and domestic pig predation
 - Domestic dogs
 - Monitor lizard
 - Beach erosion particularly during northwestern monsoon (austral summer season)
 - Elevated sand temperature particularly in Wembrak during the boreal summer season
 - Development: trans-Papua Barat road
- Priority actions
 - Diverting road inland
 - Eliminating direct take in Kei and non-index nesting beaches, and bycatch by artisanal fishers
 - Expanding program to Raja Ampat (R4) and Kaimana due to reports of nesting (not thousands)
 - Surveillance and law enforcement
 - Being undertaken in Bird's Head through 2012
 - Census and protect nesting populations
 - Address local threats: predation (to be intensified)
 - Enhance hatchling production (needs to expand hatchery for mass relocation)
 - Achieved at local government
 - Kei to set harvest quotas. It recently has been changed to MPA governance. (see this link: <http://m.wwf.or.id/?25560%2FKawasan-konservasi-Kei-Kecil-masa-depan-baru-penyu-belimbing>)
 - Trying to get both local governments to work together
- The 1983 data collection of 15,000 nesters seems to be extrapolated [MT, NP]
- The drop in numbers from 1983-1984 does seem to be real. [PD]
- The survey effort information (how often and what proportion of beach was surveyed) has to be included in that dataset [TE]
 - Not sure that sort of data is available even between 1993-2005
- Can any of the PVA models incorporate the data points from 1984 and 1985? [JS]
 - Some form of trend analysis need 3 consecutive years so it cannot include them, however, the graph provided is essentially a trend analysis without including the 3 consecutive year requirement
 - There are other forms of trend analyses that can incorporate missing data [TE]