



Pacific Regional Marine Turtle Workshops

10 – 14 February 2025

Nadi, Fiji

Sea turtles have played a significant role in the customs and traditions of Pacific island communities for thousands of years – and continue to do so to this day – featuring in many myths, legends, songs and traditions. However, sea turtles have been subjected to increasing pressure as customary practices have eroded and their popularity in commercial markets has increased, outside threats such as by-catch in commercial and artisanal fisheries has increased, and climate change threatens important nesting and feeding areas, along with sea turtle reproductive biology.

While some information exists with respect to the by-catch of sea turtles in the Pacific from industrial fisheries such as the tuna purse seines and to a lesser extent longline sectors, less is known about levels of use of sea turtles by coastal communities and impacts of small-scale fisheries across the Pacific. Similarly, little is known of the impacts of climate change on sea turtles and their important habitats across much of the Pacific, and of the status and trends of sea turtle populations at the local levels.

A coordinated regional approach is needed to conserve marine turtles, including collaborating with Members and ensuring a healthy exchange of information at national, regional, and global levels. Major constraints to implementing management actions in the region include limited financial and human resources.

From 2019 to 2024 the Bycatch and Integrated Ecosystem Management (BIEM) Initiative has helped to implement the Turtle Action Plan of the Pacific Islands Regional Marine Species Programme 2022-2026. This includes research on the status of turtles in the region through literature review, research on nesting beach conditions, research and training on turtle bycatch mitigation, community turtle use surveys, development of national action plans, and development of a regional turtle extinction risk model. Many of these activities have been conducted in collaboration with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

The results of the community turtle use surveys and the regional turtle risk extinction risk model are likely going to indicate that turtles are declining more quickly in the region than expected and several species will go extinct in the region within decades.

The BIEM Initiative, in collaboration with the Pacific BioScapes Programme will be conducting a series of 3 events in February 2025 to release the Regional Extinction Risk report and the Community Turtle Use Survey reports for PNG, Fiji and Tonga. The 3 workshops will be:

1. Regional Turtle Forum – release of reports and priority threat action planning
11-12 February
2. Regional Turtle Rangers and Monitors Learning Exchange –
12-13 February
3. Regional Turtle Community Leaders Talanoa – bringing traditional leaders from across the region to discuss turtle conservation in the context of Pacific cultures.
13-14 February

Concepts and draft agendas for all 3 workshops follow.



Regional Turtle Forum 11-12 February 2025

Introduction and Background

Marine turtles have played a significant role in the customs and traditions of Pacific island communities for thousands of years, featuring in many myths, legends, songs and traditions.

Marine turtles are integral in the functioning of marine habitats. They are highly migratory, capable of traveling thousands of miles, and readily cross jurisdictional boundaries. Few survive to adulthood, with estimates ranging from one in 1,000 to one in 10,000. Their natural lifespan is estimated to be 50 - 100 years, spending most of their life at sea, except when ashore to lay their eggs^{1,2,3}.

They are recognised globally as at risk of extinction and species of conservation concern and face numerous threats in the Pacific including from by-catch, climate change, and local consumption and trade.

SPREP is leading the By-catch and Integrated Ecosystem Management (BIEM) Initiative, which is Key Result Area 5 of the Pacific European Union Marine Partnership (PEUMP) Programme¹. Key Result Area 5.4 is focused on assessing the extinction risk of the six species of turtles found in the Pacific:

- Leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*): Oceania subpopulation Critically endangered (2018)
- Hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*): Critically endangered
- Loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*): South Pacific subpopulation Critically endangered
- Green (*Chelonia mydas*): Endangered
- Olive Ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*): Vulnerable
- Flatback (*Natator depressus*): Data deficient

This has included seeking a better understanding of coastal communities' motivations for marine turtle use and trade; patterns of direct and indirect take of different turtle species; and to record environmental parameters at specified index beaches to inform the assessment of regional extinction risk and policy aimed at reducing the exploitation of marine turtles.

SPREP investigated the sociocultural use of marine turtles and is monitoring key index turtle nesting beaches for impacts of climate change in Tonga, PNG, Vanuatu and Fiji in partnership with WWF-Coral Triangle Program, WWF-Australia and WWF-Pacific. This work builds on the turtle use survey undertaken by The Nature Conservancy in Solomon Islands, and WWF's ShellBank project. Initiated by WWF, its focus is to identify marine turtle populations impacted by overexploitation and trade in the western Pacific and define priorities for action. The results have also informed the BIEM Initiative extinction risk assessment for marine turtles in the Pacific led by Dr N. Pilcher from the Marine Research Foundation (MRF). The published data will support the achievement of identified government priorities and strengthening the knowledge of the involved communities.

SPREP and WWF-Pacific are committed to working in partnership to implement complementary projects, as detailed in the SPREP - WWF-Pacific MoU (11.102019).

¹ Avens L and Snover ML (2013) Age and age estimation in sea turtles. In *The Biology of Sea Turtles*. Volume III, Wyneken J, Lohmann KJ and Musick JA, Eds. CRC Press, Boca Raton. pp 97-133

² Limpus CJ (2009) *A Biological Review of Australian Marine Turtles*. Brisbane, Queensland. Queensland Government Environmental Protection Agency. pp 324

³ Miller JD (1997) Reproduction in sea turtles. In *The Biology of Sea Turtles*. Volume I, Lutz PL and Musick JA, Eds. CRC Press, Boca Raton, FL. pp 51-83



SPREP's Pacific Bioscapes Programme (2022-2026) is also seeking to improve data collection relating to population trends by improving key monitoring techniques including nesting beach data collection; supporting countries to implement priority actions to address threats to turtles; and responsible turtle tourism in Vanuatu and across the region and unsustainable harvest in PNG through community outreach.

Both projects are funded by the European Union with additional support from the Government of Sweden for the BIEM Initiative under the Pacific European Marine Partnership (PEUMP) programme. This project contributes directly to the Pacific Islands Regional Marine Species Programme.

This regional forum provides an opportunity to share the findings of the regional turtle extinction risk assessment, turtle use surveys and ShellBank progress, collectively discuss the implications of this work and support Pacific countries to identify actions at a regional and national level needed to address the key threats identified and what will be required to implement these activities.

All Pacific BioScapes countries, which includes the 5 BIEM target countries will be invited to participate: PNG, Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Tonga, FSM, Palau, Samoa, Cook Islands, Marshall Islands, Kiribati.

Objectives of forum

Target participants are environment and fisheries departments in Pacific island countries who have responsibilities for managing sea turtles nationally.

1. Share the results of the regional turtle extinction risk assessment, turtle use surveys and other related work undertaken through BIEM and Pacific BioScapes.
2. Identify priority regional activities needed to increase protection and management for marine turtles to address key threats and draft a turtle action plan for delivery within and across each country.



Tentative Agenda

Day 1 – 11 February 2025

Time	Agenda item	Facilitator
9.00 – 9.15	1. Welcome and opening prayer	SPREP
9.15 – 9.30	2. Chief Guest speech 3. EU delegation	Fiji Government
9.30 – 10.00	4. Workshop overview and introductions	SPREP
10.00 – 10.30	5. Group photo and tea break	
10.30 – 12.30	6. Sharing of turtle research/review findings a) Regional Turtle Use Results for PNG, Tonga, Fiji and Solomon Islands b) Turtle Extinction Risk Results c) Shellbank and Cool Turtle Projects Results d) WWF Blue Corridors for Turtles tracking project and New Caledonia Case Study e) An overview of bycatch of turtles in WCPFC are things getting better? Options for improving bycatch mitigation	Multiple
12.30 – 1.30	Lunch	
1.30 – 3.00	7. Country presentations on turtle conservation and management (5 min each) Papua New Guinea Solomon Islands Vanuatu Fiji Tonga Federated States of Micronesia Palau Samoa Cook Islands Marshall Islands Kiribati	Countries
	8. SPREP Marine Species Programme Presentation	SPREP
3.00 – 3.15	Tea break	
3.15 – 5.00	9. Plenary discussion	SPREP



Time	Agenda item	Facilitator
	What are the implications of these results within your country? What are the implications of these results regionally?	
5.00	Close	



Day 2 – 12 February 2025

Time	Agenda item	Facilitator
9.00 – 9.30	Prayer Reflections Introduction to action planning	SPREP
9.30 – 11.00	<p>Breakout groups (by countries and regional stakeholders)</p> <p>National</p> <p><i>How do we respond to these results at a national level?</i></p> <p><i>What specific actions are needed at within your country to address the key issues identified (building on any National Plans of Action you might have)?</i></p> <p><i>How do you implement these key activities including who needs to be involved, who would lead and over what timeframe?</i></p> <p><i>Output: draft action plan</i></p> <p>Regional</p> <p>How do we respond to these results at a regional level?</p> <p>How do we drive transformational change when it comes to turtle protection and management? What is the theory of change needed?</p> <p>What actions are needed at a regional level to address the issues identified and how do we best implement them (building on the Regional Action Plan)?</p>	All
11.00 – 11.30	Morning tea	
11.30 – 1.00	<p>Breakout groups continued</p> <p>Group discussion (1 hr)</p> <p>Sharing of breakout results groups (5min each – 30 min)</p>	
1.00 – 2.00	Lunch	
2.00 – 3.30	<p>Breakout results continued</p> <p>Sharing of breakout results from groups continued (5min each – 30min)</p> <p>Plenary discussion (1 hr)</p>	



Time	Agenda item	Facilitator
	What is missing? How do we better coordinate across the region? How do we better coordinate between countries where turtles are migrating between?	
3.30 – 3.45	Afternoon tea	
3.45 – 4.45	Plenary discussion How do we sustainably finance the actions needed?	
4.45 – 5.00	Next steps and closing remarks	