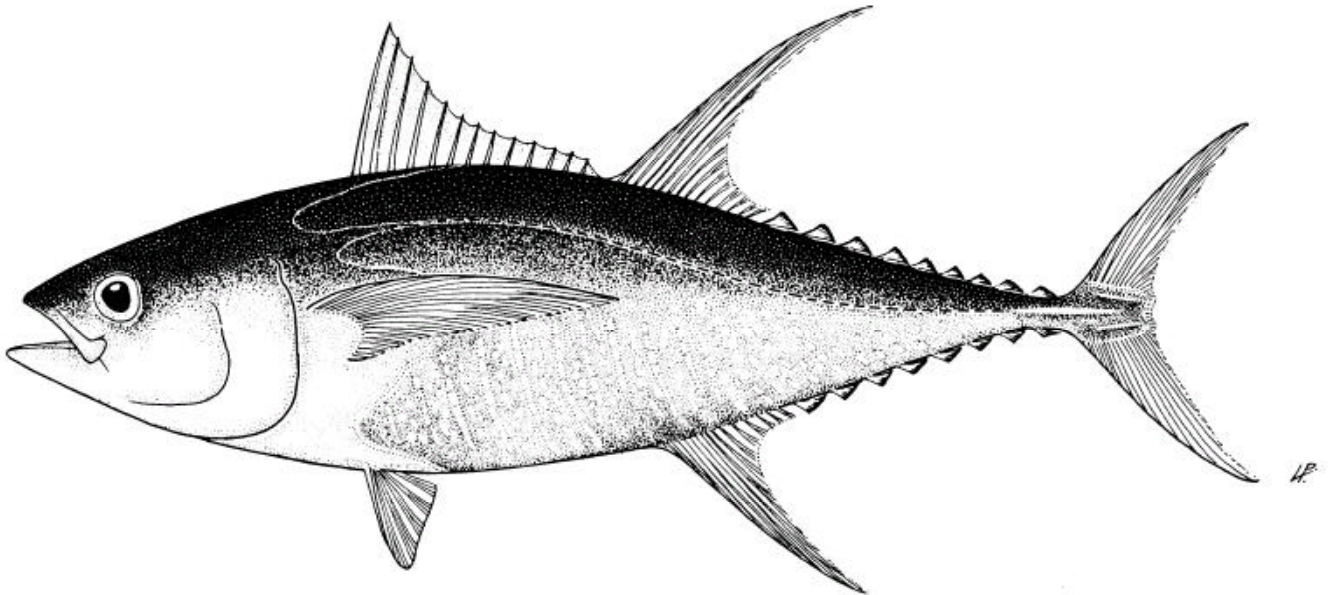


## INFO-2



### **Prospectus: International Longline Marine Turtle Bycatch Technical Workshop**



**Barbara Schroeder**

Office of Protected Resources  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
Silver Spring, Maryland

## PROSPECTUS: International Longline Marine Turtle Bycatch Technical Workshop

### BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION:

Marine turtle populations have declined worldwide over the last century and all species have been listed on Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) since the Convention entered into force in 1975. The leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*), hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), and Kemp's ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*) are listed as Critically Endangered under the Red List of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*), olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*), and green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) are listed as Endangered and the flatback (*Natator depressus*) is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List. Except for the flatback, which is indigenous to Australia, all species are listed under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

Population declines have been documented in specific nesting assemblages of the loggerhead in the Atlantic and Pacific as well as the green turtle in the eastern Pacific. Of particular concern is the leatherback which is seriously declining throughout the Pacific and has experienced an overall decline in the Atlantic. Once numbering in the tens of thousands, a 1996 study of the four major nesting beaches for the Pacific leatherback in Mexico, which sustained perhaps as much as half of all global nesting for this species, revealed that the population had collapsed. Annual surveys conducted since 1996 have revealed precipitously low levels of population with only a few hundred females nesting annually along the entire Pacific coast of Mexico. The decline in these populations is due primarily to human-related causes including incidental capture in commercial and artisanal fisheries and poaching of eggs and nesting females.

All species of marine turtles are caught in longline gear. Incidental capture is documented for U.S. and international longline fisheries in the Atlantic as well as the Pacific. In the Pacific, approximately 28 nations have active longline operations. Dominant fisheries operating in the Western Pacific and South China Sea include Japan and Taiwan. Fleets from the United States, Chile, Ecuador, Costa Rica, and Spanish fleets operating out of Peru comprise a large portion of longline effort in the Eastern Pacific. Dominant fisheries in the Atlantic include Brazil, Canada, Japan, Portugal, Spain, Taiwan, United States, Uruguay and the Caribbean. For most of these fishing fleets, little or no data exist regarding the incidental bycatch of marine turtle populations. However, there are some observer and self-reporting programs. For example, information from commercial logbooks, research vessel data and questionnaires from longliners indicate that the Japanese tuna longliners operating in the western Pacific and South China Sea may incidentally capture a significant number of marine turtles annually. Records from an observer and questionnaire program in the Spanish longline fleet operating in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean also indicate a substantial number of takes per year, and, based on observer records, the annual estimate of the number of turtles caught in the U.S. longline fleets in the Atlantic and Pacific is in the thousands.

Marine turtles are a global resource and their populations are impacted, in part, by incidental capture in commercial and artisanal fisheries. Of particular concern, is the high level of capture

in longline fisheries. Many nations support large fleets or are expanding their longline fisheries. The United States proposes to support a workshop consisting of technical experts on sea turtle biology and longline fishery operations from interested nations in order to share information and discuss possible solutions to reduce incidental capture of marine turtles in these fisheries.

**OBJECTIVES:**

- (1) To evaluate existing information on turtle bycatch in longline fisheries.
- (2) To facilitate and standardize collection of data from those longline fisheries that are likely to interact with marine turtles.
- (3) To exchange information on experimentation with longline gear relative to turtles and target species.
- (4) To identify and consider solutions to reduce turtle bycatch in longline fisheries.