



WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For additional information or photographs, please contact:
Irene Kinan, Turtle Coordinator
Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council
Irene.kinan@noaa.gov or +1 808 522-8220

**International Program that Unites Fishermen to Protect Sea Turtles Convenes in Honolulu,
Hopes to Save Hundreds of Loggerheads**

HONOLULU (21 August 2007) In the summer of 2002, Anselmo Ruiz-Camacho, a halibut fisherman in Baja California, Mexico, asked Hoyt Peckham, "How can loggerhead turtles possibly be endangered when I caught 30 in my nets this morning?" All but two of the incidentally caught turtles were dead.

The question astonished Peckham, a scientist with Pro Peninsula and University of California-Santa Cruz PhD candidate. He knew that fewer than 1,500 loggerheads nested in the North Pacific the winter before, and, despite conservation efforts, nesting has declined 50 to 80 percent over the past decade.

To Ruiz-Camacho loggerheads appeared to be numerous because the turtles regularly aggregate off the Baja California peninsula. Highly migratory creatures, the turtles hatch on the beaches of southern Japan and then migrate across the Pacific to Baja California via the Hawaiian Islands. When reproductively mature, they return to Japan to mate and nest.

Now a unique program, the Tri-national Fishermen's Exchange, is bringing together fishermen, scientists and community leaders from these three areas to help fishermen find solutions to protect the turtles while maintaining their livelihoods. Following the migratory route of the North Pacific loggerheads, the group met in Japan in 2006, in Baja California earlier this month and in Hawaii last week. They held discussions with local fishing industry representatives and research scientists, witnessed the recovery of Hawaii green sea turtles and finalized resolutions on actions they could take.

One of these actions is expected to save hundreds of loggerheads each year. Efrain de la Paz Regaldo, the patron of a Mexican shark fishing fleet, has declared that he will no longer bottom set longlines that killed more than 700 loggerheads in 2005. De la Paz's declaration represents a monumental breakthrough in loggerhead conservation because his six skiffs were killing more loggerheads than any other fleet on record.

"Prior to this program we didn't realize the global impacts of our local bycatch," De la Paz said. "Once we understood, we saw that our bycatch was both an embarrassment and a grave problem. So we are fixing the problem, with input from our Hawaii and Japanese partners."

De la Paz's decision came after understanding the conservation "big picture" and discussions with fellow exchange member Leland Oldenburg. A Hawaii-based fisherman, Oldenburg had shared the experiences of the Hawaii Longline Association in reducing unintended interactions with sea turtles.

--- more ---

Hawaii longline fishermen who target swordfish are allowed to hook, tangle or otherwise interact with only 17 loggerhead turtles annually. Even if the turtles are uninjured and released alive, after 17 interactions the fishery is closed for the year.

Hawaii fishermen, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council and NOAA scientists have worked together to minimize longline interactions with sea turtles. Among the measures that have proved effective are setting at night, using circle hooks and using fish instead of squid as bait.

“Hawaii is setting the example,” says Juan Ignacio Romero, a fisherman from San Juanico, Baja California. “The world needs to hear about their achievements and the fact that they are still making a living from fishing.”

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council is the federal agency managing fisheries in the U.S. Pacific islands. It supports the Tri-National Exchange Program, funds the bycatch reduction component of Proyecto Caguama to conserve loggerhead sea turtles in the northeast Pacific and co-sponsors Proyecto Caguama’s educational outreach, community networks and pride campaigns. The Council also supports loggerhead nesting beach conservation projects in Japan, leatherback nesting beach conservation projects in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, and a circle hook exchange program to reduce sea turtle interactions with artisanal longline fisheries in Latin America.

The Tri-National Fishermen’s Exchange is the brainchild of Pro Peninsula, a non-profit organization that supports conservation activities in Baja California. Participants include (from Japan) Yoshimasa Matsuzawa, Sea Turtle Association of Japan; Kojiro Mizuno, Sea Turtle Association of Japan; Kazuhiko Sasaki, Peninsula de Izu fisherman; Mitsuharu Kume, Isla de Tanegashima fisherman; and Daisuke Suda, Isla de Tanegashima fisherman; (from Mexico) Johath Laudino, Grupo Tortuguero; Jesus Lucero, Grupo Tortuguero and San Lazaro fisherman; Jose Efraín de La Paz Regalado, Cooperativa de Santa Rosa; Florencio Aguilar Liera, Cooperativa Puerto Chale de San Juanico; Raquel Briseno, Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico; Georgita Ruiz, Pro Peninsula/Proyecto Caguama; and Venustiano Perez, community leader, Baja California Sur; and (from Hawaii / United States) Hoyt Peckham, University of Southern California and Pro Peninsula; Kama Dean, Pro Peninsula; Leland Oldenburg, fisherman, Hawaii Longline Association; Diane Oldenburg, fisherman, Hawaii Longline Association; and Irene Kinan, Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council.

For more information, contact Irene Kinan at irene.kinan@noaa.gov or +1 808 522-8220.

###