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### **Progress Made Towards Mitigating Sea Turtle Bycatch in Coastal Net Fisheries**

HONOLULU (24 January 2009) Growing evidence is indicating that small-scale artisanal fisheries may be the largest single threat to some sea turtle populations. These fisheries use gill nets, pound nets, large fixed fish traps and other static gear that inadvertently catch, tangle and drown the turtles. The three-day *Technical Workshop on Mitigating Sea Turtle Bycatch in Coastal Net Fisheries*, which concluded Thursday in Honolulu, made significant strides towards addressing this threat.

“Large numbers of turtles, especially North Pacific loggerheads, are caught and killed each year by pound nets and gillnets,” explained Kitty Simonds, executive director of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, which convened the workshop. “Transferring new gear technology and other mitigation measures from net fisheries where progress has been made to address this problem to similar fisheries in other regions was one of the major objectives of the workshop.”

Pound nets are used extensively around the coastal waters of Japan and other parts of East Asia, while gillnets are employed around the Pacific Rim and in the Pacific Islands. The workshop looked at promising solutions from the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans to minimize turtle catches in both types of gear. For example, while many fisheries use pound nets that have submerged catch chambers in which captive turtles drown, other pound nets have an open catching chamber where turtles can reach the surface to breathe.

The workshop provided the first opportunity for experts from multiple relevant disciplines to share information from 20 gillnet and pound-net fisheries worldwide. Participants reviewed the assessment status and mitigation activities of the fisheries; shared information on effective, affordable gear to mitigate sea turtle capture and injury in coastal net fisheries; identified research priorities to advance turtle-friendly gear and fishing methods; and explored the range of tools available to assess, mitigate and manage sea turtle bycatch in artisanal fisheries.

“The meeting fostered new partnerships and has effectively advanced the transfer of best practices for bycatch mitigation in artisanal coastal net fisheries,” said Eric Gilman, International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) marine science advisor.

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The workshop is the latest in a decade long series of initiatives by the Council's Protected Species Program to recover Pacific sea turtle populations. The workshop included 49 participants from 17 countries, representing intergovernmental organizations, fishery agencies, national fishery management authorities, environmental non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, fishing industries and donor organizations. It was co-hosted by the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC), the Indian Ocean–South-East Asian Marine Turtle MoU (IOSEA) and the US National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Southeast Fisheries Science Center.

Proceedings and a technical report on mitigating sea turtle bycatch in coastal net fisheries will be available in coming weeks. For copies or more information on the workshop, contact Gilman at [eric.gilman@iucn.org](mailto:eric.gilman@iucn.org).

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council is the policy-making agency for fisheries management in offshore waters around the US Pacific Islands. It is the first regional fishery management council in the nation to prohibit drift gill-net fishing, require the use of vessel monitoring systems (VMS) and to develop an ecosystem-based fishery management plan. For more information, contact the Council at (808) 522-8220, (808) 522-8226 (fax), [info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov](mailto:info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov) or [www.wpcouncil.org](http://www.wpcouncil.org).

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### Mitigating Sea Turtle Bycatch in Coastal Net Fisheries Workshop Participant List

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