

**Answers to Follow-Up Questions posed to Ms. Kitty Simonds,
Executive Director, Western Pacific Fishery Management Council,
by the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy following
the Hawaii and Pacific Islands Regional Meeting,
Honolulu, Hawaii, May 13-14, 2002**

Q. Much of the written and oral testimony presented at the meeting concerned swordfish and tuna long line fisheries off of Hawaii. It seems the that U.S. fishermen are paying the price to save endangered Pacific sea turtles even though international fishing efforts may be a much bigger cause of mortality of the turtles. The Commission would like to ask you to submit a written response indicating your views on how to address this problem on an international scale. What types of agreements can be crafted that would address all of the causes of mortality of the endangered sea turtles?

A. Clearly, the US fishery is only a tiny part (2-4%) of the Pacific longline fleet, so its impacts from a fishery perspective are small. To assess fishery impacts to turtles through the entire Pacific requires the use of existing and planned management authorities such as IATTC and the new tuna commission for the West-Central Pacific to harmonize and integrate various national and regional observer programs to really get a handle on the volume of longline-turtle interactions. Preliminary work to date, however, for the tropical (10 deg N to 10 dge S) West-Central Pacific suggest that the number of interactions is low, about 2000 per year, but based on low observer coverage. Some fishery interactions are probably more severe, particularly from gill netters along the Central and South American Pacific coasts, where turtles are also targeted heavily for food. Loss of nesting habitat, harvests of eggs and adults has the greatest impact on turtle populations. When the Eastern Pacific olive ridley nests were protected the species bounced back, despite impacts from longline and gillnet fisheries. The solution to turtle declines can not solely be solved by fishery management alone, although the scale of fishery impacts needs to be properly assesed.

Q. The coordination of U.S. international living marine resource interests and negotiations is of considerable importance, both in terms of exporting our nation's strong stewardship ethic, as well as in maintaining the health of resources in international waters in which we have commercial and conservation interests. The U .S. State Department is charged with coordinating and negotiating the nation's position in international forums. The Commission would be very interested to know your view on what, if any, changes would improve the current system to both strengthen the federal coordination process as well as improve the foundation from which our representatives negotiate with our international partners.

A. The recovery plans drafts for turtles are supposed to form the framework for inter-agency cooperation on recovering turtle populations. More resources have been committed to fulfilling the objectives of these plans but there is still a long way to go. A recovery team needs to be put together to drive the plans. The benefits from this can be seen with the Hawaii monk seal which has had a recovery team in place for many years which has driven the work designed to recover this endangered population. At the international level, the Dept of State needs to convene meetings that involve the participation of the fishing industries whose vessels and gears interact with turtles. Although the fishing industry is part of the problem they need to be fully involved in

seeking solutions to minimizing turtle interactions. Further, longline fishing nations and fishing industries should not feel "threatened" by US concerns about turtles. The major Asian fishing nations, Japan, Korea and Taiwan had to shut down their high seas drift net fisheries in the early 1990s, and they are still sensitized from that experience. Further, many Pacific Island and Southeast Asian nations are actively expanding their own longline fisheries, so working with the various fishing nations is going to be essential to developing protocols and measures to minimize longline-turtle interactions.