

**Remarks by Scott Burns, Executive Director  
Marine Conservation Programs  
World Wildlife Fund  
Sea Turtle Press Conference  
National Press Club  
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Good afternoon. I'm here today on behalf of World Wildlife Fund to do two things. First I'd like to congratulate NOAA and the Bluewater Fisherman's Association for collaborating in this important research initiative, and to highlight the significance of this research, the future sea turtle conservation efforts. Secondly, I'm here today to announce that my organization is calling on governments and fishing groups around the world to build on this important initiative and to expeditiously undertake similar research and implement new conservation measures to protect sea turtles and other longline fisheries.

Now, regarding my first point, as you've already heard from our earlier speakers, this research is globally significant because important sea turtle populations are in trouble today. In particular, my organization is concerned, as Bill Hogarth noted, with the precipitous decline of leatherback turtle populations in the Pacific. For nearly two decades, my organization has been working to protect important sea turtle sites in the Pacific. We worked with the governments of the Philippines and Malaysia to create the first international protected area for sea turtles in the Turtle Islands in 1996. Closer to our shores, we've been actively supporting new conservation measures by the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles. That's the international agreement aimed at recovering sea turtle populations in the Eastern Pacific Ocean.

But everywhere we look today we see important turtle populations disappearing. As I said before, we're especially concerned about leatherback populations, and it's estimated that in 1980 there were over 90,000 leatherback turtles in the Eastern Pacific Ocean. Today some experts tell us they estimate that less than 3,000 adult turtles remain in this region, a decline of roughly 95 percent.

Clearly we need to act now to reverse this decline and to ensure that healthy sea turtle populations remain for future generations. And this research – and once again, we want to congratulate NOAA and the Bluewater fishermen on it. This research provides a very important piece of the puzzle if we're going to succeed in achieving this objective.

Because so many sea turtle populations, especially leatherbacks, are critically threatened, WWF is also calling on other governments and fishing groups to quickly form new partnerships to conduct similar research initiatives and to expeditiously adopt new conservation measures based on these research results. In the Pacific, there's going to be a very important opportunity to move forward with this initiative that'll take place next week when the fishing nations of the Eastern Pacific meet in Kobe, Japan to discuss the conservation of sea turtles. WWF calls on the participants in this meeting to take concrete steps to reduce sea turtle bycatch, to build on NOAA's successful effort, and to recognize the critical status of sea turtle populations today.

And for our part, we pledge to work with nations and fishing groups to design and implement new initiatives to protect sea turtles. We've begun, in particular, serious discussions with the government of Ecuador, which has the largest domestic longline fleet in the Eastern Pacific Ocean, concerning a partnership to reduce sea turtle bycatch in the domestic longline fleet there. And we look forward to collaborating in a similar manner with other governments in the region.

NOAA and its sister agencies in the United States have a central role to play in this international effort. You've already heard from Dr. Hogarth about NOAA's commitment to share the results of this research initiative with other governments and to actively assist other nations with efforts to conserve sea turtles. So in closing I'd like to express our commitment to work with NOAA, with other groups like the Bluewater Fisherman's Association, and to use our international reach as an organization to move forward in solving this critical conservation problem. Thanks.