



GRANTEE

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WATERBODY

South China Sea Large Marine Ecosystem



START DATE

14 April 2014



AMOUNT

US\$148,000

COFINANCING

US\$75,000

CASE 6

Reducing Sea Turtle Bycatch, Malaysia

PROJECT CONTEXT

In Malaysia, various state and national laws protect marine sea turtles; and four species have been identified for conservation purposes. However, the once abundant leatherback turtle is now functionally extinct. The olive ridley is down to just tens of nests per year. The hawksbill hangs on precariously. Only green turtle numbers remain stable, with several hundred turtles nesting regularly at a few rookeries and some 5,000 nests annually off Sandakan, in Sabah (Borneo).

While green turtles are abundant, they face exceptional challenges and the greatest of these is accidental capture in commercial and artisanal fisheries. Sea turtles share habitats with certain shrimp and fish species and are put at risk by shrimp trawling. As the nets roll along the seabed they indiscriminately catch and drown numerous sea turtles – estimated at some 3,000 to 4,000 each year in Sabah alone.

Until recently, there were limited ecosystem-based fishery management measures in Malaysia, and scant involvement of local fishing communities in fishery management decision-making and policy. Because of this, bycatch remained a serious concern – not only of smaller juvenile and trash fish but also of endangered large marine species such as marine turtles. The lack of protection of turtles (and other marine life) limits Malaysia's shrimp export due to legal restrictions in importing countries, and turtle populations have continued to decline at alarming rates.



PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP), implemented by UNDP, supported the Marine Research Foundation (MRF) to develop and implement a long-term national bycatch reduction programme in partnership with the Department of Fisheries of Malaysia (DOFM). The programme had an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries to improve the conservation status of sea turtles and their habitats in Malaysia. This was achieved through the use of Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs), which are oval metal grids affixed in the narrow portion of the net, allowing fish and shrimp to pass through to the cod end while ejecting large objects, such as turtles, through a net webbing 'trapdoor'.

TEDs improve the quality of the catch, as large objects such as logs and large animals do not crush it, and the reduction of debris in the back of the net saves fuel, which is a benefit to fishers. Although TEDs have many advantages, fishers were wary of using them because of the large exit 'trapdoor' in the net that allows turtles and debris to escape, and they were concerned that their target catch would be lost through this opening.

The strategic objective of this project was the conservation of sea turtles by working with local fishing communities and the government to achieve the adoption of TED technology. To this end, the project worked on removing knowledge barriers, promoting national and state mainstreaming activities, and fostering community-based stewardship among fishers. The project worked directly with fishing communities in six key states in the country (Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang, Johor, Sarawak and Sabah) and with the Department of Fisheries in Malaysia to introduce TEDs in coastal communities using demonstration trials, practical TED construction workshops, knowledge exchange sessions, and at-sea comparison trials, data gathering and sharing.



The project also helped Malaysia to achieve key commitments under international agreements including the Convention of Biological Diversity, the IOSEA Turtle MoU (reduction of bycatch, reduction of direct turtle mortality), the Coral Triangle Initiative (Ecosystem Approaches to Fishery Management and conservation of threatened marine fauna), and the Sulu Sulawesi Seascape programme. The current project builds on several years of project implementation experience in the course of two SGP grants and leveraging co-financing from several other donors.



RESULTS AND UPSCALING

Prior to the project, Malaysia did not have any laws or regulations that protected sea turtles from mechanized fishing fleets. This project has led to the establishment of a TED Implementation Task Force at the national level and to the commitment from the Department of Fisheries of Malaysia to make TEDs mandatory with legislation to this effect to exist as of 2017. By November 2016, all 184 vessels licensed along the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia will be TED compliant. Major ports in Sabah will follow, where TED uptake is already underway. Additional efforts are needed in Sarawak.

This project has had a profound impact on fisheries and bycatch reduction policy in Malaysia and has led to the development of a medium-size proposal (\$1.25 million) submitted to the GEF by DOFM, requesting the large scale funding for bycatch reduction in Malaysian fisheries.

Furthermore, because of the project there is now a dialogue between the Governments of Malaysia and the United States, through which Malaysia intends to seek a Section 609 certification from the US State Department that would allow export of shrimp fishery products to US markets. The first visit of the US State Department officials to meet with Malaysian Fishery Department officials was scheduled for late April 2016.

EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS LEARNT

This project has been replicating activities as it expanded from port to port and State to State, using processes developed during SGP-funded Phases I and II. The project continues to build on the success of this and other TED project components. The project has developed a replicable system in collaboration with DOFM with the standard printed and electronic documentation disseminated in many national workshops. It is envisaged that this process will continue building momentum as it progresses into the final phase of project activities.

Upscaling has not happened accidentally, it was intended and nurtured through ten years of continuous effort working with different partners. In 2007, the first bycatch project started with an SGP grant, and co-financing from the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration-NOAA and Conservation International. In 2009, MRF received a second SGP grant to continue to expand on the key activities and results of the first project. Over time, MRF continued to develop the programme, raised additional co-financing and submitted a strategic project to SGP to scale up the efforts. This last grant received two matching grants from NOAA.

During this time and following extensive collaboration with DOFM, MRF developed a larger scale medium-size GEF grant application to expand both the scope and the thoroughness of the bycatch deduction process.

With regards to upscaling, SGP's continued support to the work of MRF was instrumental in persuading and empowering the DOFM to submit a proposal for a GEF Medium sized project. In the evolution

from a small NGO-led initiative in six states to National Government-led programme across all major shrimp trawling states in the country, regulations have been adopted to govern TED use and licensing.

