

Developing strategies for global and regional sea turtle status assessments: perspectives from the MTSG membership



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- One of the responsibilities of the Marine Turtle Specialist Group (MTSG) is to conduct global status assessments of sea turtle species, to be included in the IUCN-World Conservation Union's Red List of Threatened Species.
- There has been recent debate about the value of the IUCN Red List for illuminating population trends on regional and national scales
- As part of its Sea Turtle Assessment Strategy, the MTSG will launch a regional sea turtle assessment initiative for all species in all regions
- To ensure that the strategies employed in this effort are reflective of the attitudes and ideas of its membership, the MTSG leadership circulated a Red List Questionnaire to membership during the second half of 2006.
- A total of 50 respondents from 23 countries provided input on 10 questions
- This poster summarizes the results of this MTSG Red List Questionnaire and highlights some of the key aspects that MTSG members believe are necessary for developing the most effective regional assessments for sea turtles.

What is the IUCN Red List?

- Report on Extinction Risk for ~18,000 animals and plants
- Uses quantitative criteria to calculate a species' change the global abundance or its probability of extinction
- Flags species that are doing poorly
- Currently lists hawksbills, leatherbacks, and Kemp's ridleys as Critically Endangered, green turtles, olive ridleys, and loggerheads as Endangered, and flatbacks as Data Deficient.

In a nutshell, what do MTSG member's think?

The majority of respondents said that the MTSG should only undertake regional assessments if they are included in the Red List, yet only 10% believe that the MTSG should follow IUCN's guidelines for regional assessments. This underscores the need to discuss an alternative approach with IUCN.

1. How familiar are you with the Red Listing system and with assessments in general?

not at all familiar (LOW)	somewhat familiar (MED)	very familiar (HIGH)
2%	60%	38%

Questions 2-10 are summarized by respondent familiarity with Red Listing = LOW, MED (medium), HIGH, and ALL (all respondents)
(note: since multiple options could be selected, tallies per category ≥ 100%)

2. Done properly, a Red List Assessment requires broad consultation and can take hundreds of hours to complete. Considering the enormity of the task and the high demands for volunteer-power, please describe your thoughts about MTSG efforts in Red List assessments.

	LOW	MED	HIGH	ALL
- MTSG spends too much time on Red Listing	10%	16%	12%	
- MTSG spends just the right amount of energy	100%	63%	58%	62%
- MTSG spends too little time on Red Listing		17%	26%	20%

3. Should MTSG undertake regional assessments, even if they are not included in the IUCN Global Red List Database?

	LOW	MED	HIGH	ALL
- Regional assessments are not necessary		10%	16%	12%
- Necessary only if included on Red List	100%	63%	58%	62%
- Necessary regardless of Red List		17%	26%	20%

Section B: Options for regional assessments

Even if you think regional assessments are unnecessary, please answer questions 4 - 10 assuming that regional assessments will be pursued.

4. What is an appropriate population segment for a regional assessment?

	LOW	MED	HIGH	ALL
- By nesting beach	100%	20%	5%	16%
- By genetic uniqueness (i.e. stock)		40%	21%	34%
- By geographic region		37%	74%	50%
- None of the above		10%	5%	8%

5. What is an appropriate temporal starting point that a regional assessment should use for characterizing population abundance changes?

	LOW	MED	HIGH	ALL
- As far back as possible w/ extrapolations		23%	10%	16%
- 3 generations back w/ extrapolations		13%	26%	20%
- Earliest point with data, w/o extrapolation	100%	53%	68%	60%
- Other		10%	5%	10%

6. Three approaches to regional assessments are possible: i) the MTSG could adopt existing IUCN criteria for regional assessments, ii) the MTSG could develop its own set of criteria to be applied in all regional assessments, iii) the MTSG could adopt a flexible approach, describing the regional situation as much as possible and then placing a region in a particular category on a consensus basis. Which of these possibilities do you think is best?

	LOW	MED	HIGH	ALL
- Follow existing IUCN regional assessment criteria		67%	16%	10%
- Develop MTSG-specific criteria		40%	58%	46%
- Adopt a flexible, non-standardized approach	100%	50%	26%	42%
- Other			7%	4%

7. Should regional status assessments describe the Extinction Risk of a population or simply focus on change in population abundance?

	LOW	MED	HIGH	ALL
- Extinction risk only		3%	5%	4%
- % Change in abundance only		7%	10%	8%
- Both	100%	90%	84%	88%

8. Should MTSG assessments use the same status categories as the IUCN Red List (e.g. Critically Endangered, Endangered, Vulnerable) or devise new terms that are different from those currently used in the Red List (e.g. Severely Reduced, Reduced, Reduced but Increasing, Conservation Dependent. This list is an example only and choosing option c below does not imply approval of this list).

	LOW	MED	HIGH	ALL
- Be consistent with IUCN	100%	47%	68%	56%
- Use some but not necessarily all IUCN labels		40%	16%	28%
- Develop all new labels		13%		8%
- Other		7%	16%	10%

9. In your opinion, what components should be included in a regional status assessment?

	LOW	MED	HIGH	ALL
- Quantification of abundance changes	100%	90%	95%	92%
- Description of ongoing threats	100%	80%	79%	86%
- Conservation recommendations	100%	80%	79%	78%

10. Should the precautionary principle enter into presentation of the data or be excluded. (An example of precautionary principle would be to list a subpopulation at the greatest threat category possible based on existing information)

	LOW	MED	HIGH	ALL
- Followed as much as possible		47%	68%	56%
- Followed where appropriate	100%	47%	21%	36%
- Never followed			10%	4%

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Countries represented: Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Cayman Islands, Colombia, Costa Rica, France, Greece, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Peru, Philippines, Puerto Rico, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Taiwan, Tunisia, United Kingdom, Uruguay, USA, Venezuela