

# Status of leatherback turtles in Iraq

## 1. Introduction

Extending over an area of approximately 434,317 sq. km, Iraq is located in south-west Asia. It lies at the northeastern tip of the Arabian (Persian) Gulf and has a total coastline of 58 km. The maritime area of Iraq falls within the northwestern Arabian (Persian) Gulf.

## 2. The legal protection status for leatherback turtles

### 2.1 Overview

Information available indicates that there is no legislation to protect habitats and ecosystems for nature conservation. The Iraqi government appears to generally give low priority to nature conservation, with only a few conservation laws known to exist, mostly relating to restrictions on hunting and fishing. These laws, Forestry Law No. 75, Environment wildlife Law and Hunting Laws Nos. 40 and 41, seem to only exist on paper and have never been implemented or enforced.

At a broader international level, Iraq is a contracting party to the World Heritage Convention, but has yet to designate any natural World Heritage Sites. Key biodiversity conventions Iraq has not signed include the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). Iraq is a member of ROPME, the Regional Organisation for the Protection of the Marine Environment, and a signatory to the Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982).

### 2.2 Management agencies responsible for marine turtle conservation

It is unclear what current management of monitoring capacity, if any, exists in Iraq as it goes through reconstruction following the recent war.

## 3. Nesting populations

There are no historical or contemporary records of leatherbacks nesting in Iraq.

## 4. Foraging populations

### 4.1 Overview

There are no records of leatherbacks having been seen in Iraq's waters. No research of any kind or directed conservation action has been carried out on leatherbacks in Iraq.

### 4.2 Threats to leatherback turtles

Prior to the Gulf War clear evidence of mangrove die-off close to Khore Zubair and Khor abd Allah was available in satellite imagery, and aerial surveillance immediately after the war showed strong indications of impact from oil spills, as well as other war damage. Drainage of the marsh areas of the Tigris-Euphrates Delta and the damming of these two rivers may have a very large impact on the northern Gulf marine ecosystems. Government water control projects have drained most of the inhabited marsh areas east of An Nasiriyah by drying up or diverting the feeder streams and rivers.

In addition, oil exploitation and other activities lead to pollution input into the marine environment from well blow-outs, oil pipelines leakage, loading terminals and discharges from refineries. Natural oil seepage is another source of pollution, estimated at about 10% of the overall chronic oil discharges. Up to 35,000 tankers pass through the Straits of Hormuz annually, making the Gulf among the busiest tanker routes in the world. It is unknown what, if any, impacts these factors might have on the few leatherbacks in the Gulf.

### 4.3 Protection of foraging areas

There are no declared MPAs along the relatively short Iraqi Arabian Gulf coastline. Areas that have not been developed and that are recommended for protection include the mudflats near Khore Zubair and Khor abd Allah.

### 4.4. Gaps in capacity and requirements for improved conservation

Unknown.