

Status of leatherback turtles in Japan

By Mark Hamann, Colin Limpus and Naoki Kamezaki

1. The legal protection status for leatherback turtles

1.1 Overview

The Japanese government banned capture of leatherback turtle and its eggs not only in the territory of Japan but also in the high-seas between 70 N and 50 S (the Law for Conservation of Aquatic Resources).

2. Nesting populations

Extensive surveys of Japanese beaches for marine turtle nesting has been conducted (see Uchida and Nishiwaki 1982 and Kikukawa et al. 1999). There have been only two records of leatherback turtle clutches being laid in Japan (Kamezaki et al. 2002).

3. Foraging populations

Some stranded leatherback turtles have been found along the coastline both in the Pacific Ocean coast and the Sea of Japan, indicating that this species migrates into Japanese waters (Nishimura 1964; Oike and Kato 1997; Horikoshi et al. 2000; Israel 2002, Oike et al. 2004). At least on tag recovery was reported from off southern Japan of a leatherback turtle tagged as a nesting female at Terengganu, Malaysia, in the 1970s (See Malaysian section). Furthermore, one of the post nesting female leatherback turtles released from Papua – Indonesia was tracked via satellite telemetry into Japanese waters (Benson and Dutton unpublished data). The complete stranding data for marine turtles in Japan has not been published yet and although bycatch has been recorded in some fisheries it has not been accurately quantified for leatherback turtles (Horikoshi et al. 2000; Israel 2002).

3.1 Threats to leatherback turtles

The most significant current threats to leatherback turtles in Japan, or by Japanese fleets in international waters, is bycatch in fishing gear (Yatsu et al. 1991; Wetherall et al. 1993; Horikoshi et al. 2000; Israel 2002; Nakano 2005). However, the Japanese National Research Institute of Far Seas Fisheries has embarked on a project to quantify marine turtle bycatch and reduce the impacts of fishing on marine turtles (see Nakano 2005). There have been recent efforts to reduce fisheries related bycatch by Japanese fisheries in the Pacific Ocean (see Bellagio Blueprint for Action on Pacific Sea Turtles and the Proceedings of the International Tuna Fishers Conference on Responsible Fisheries July 2005).

4. References

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