

# Status of leatherback turtles in Kuwait

## 1. Introduction

Kuwait is bounded in the east by the Arabian or Persian Gulf. The Kuwaiti Gulf is represented by at least four critical marine habitats: coastal marsh and mudflat, coral reef, seagrass bed and mangrove. Kuwait has traditionally long been regarded as a vast *hema*, or culturally protected area. However, over the last two decades traditional practices have broken down as a consequence of urban development and industrialisation (Alsdarawi in lit. 1991). Today, virtually the entire coastline is built-up with residential or commercial buildings, and no public access is available to the beach. Only the few small offshore islands permit access to the shore.

## 2. The legal protection status for leatherback turtles

### 2.1 Overview

Kuwait is a contracting part to the Kuwait Regional Convention for Cooperation on the Protection of the Marine Environment from Pollution, and actively participates in meetings concerned with additional protocols and the Kuwait Action Plan.

Legislation relating to protected areas is based on Decree No. 18 (1968). As such, Kuwait municipality has control of the land-use in all designated nature conservation areas and has the right to remove unauthorised users. The main piece of legislation governing protected areas and the protection of the environment is Decree Law No. 62/1980. Article 3 Item 1 indicates a general policy for the protection of the environment. This encompasses five main areas of which the conservation of nature and natural resources is one. Section 2 of the general framework for environmental protection deals with the preservation of nature and natural resources. Section 2a covers nature; it encompasses the necessary legislation, regulations and codes of practice, the provisions of adequate funds, manpower and legal capabilities to implement a comprehensive national plan. Measures have also been included to prevent the decline of marine turtles.

### 2.2 Management agencies responsible for marine turtle conservation

The Environment Protection Council (EPC) is empowered to develop a general policy for the protection of the environment and to propose protected areas, working with the municipality and other relevant agencies. The EPC is chartered to develop short and long-term integrated work plans, to coordinate activities, study pollution problems and prepare research policies, regulations and coordinate Kuwait's ratification of appropriate regional and international agreements. The EPC has also been empowered to carry out flora and faunal surveys and be involved in active protected area management. The protected areas system is under the management and direct supervision of the Public Authority for Agriculture and Fisheries (PAAF).

The Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) is involved in protection and management of the environment in addition to undertaking research on coastal ecosystems and in providing scientific support for the oil sector. Amongst the many bodies, in addition to KISR, which undertake environmentally related research in protected areas is the Department of Agriculture of the Ministry of Public Works. The Regional Organisation for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME), with offices based in Kuwait, has been actively involved in evaluating the action plan, including its marine pollution monitoring and research programme. Non-governmental agencies involved in nature conservation and environmental assessment include the Ahmadi Natural History and Field Studies Group.

## 3. Nesting populations

There are no historical or contemporary records of leatherback turtles nesting in Kuwait.

## 4. Foraging populations

### 4.1 Overview

Al-Mohanna & Meakins (2000) reported a leatherback being seen in Kuwait, although there are no additional contemporary records of leatherbacks having been seen in Kuwaiti waters. While significant research and conservation action has been implemented for hawksbill turtles, no research of any kind has been carried out on leatherback turtles in Kuwait.

#### 4.2 Threats to leatherback turtles

Given the physical nature of the Gulf, with its narrow bottle-neck opening and shallow shore approaches, it is unlikely leatherback turtles are anything more than transients or waifs. If leatherback turtles were to be found in Kuwaiti waters, they would be threatened by coastal gillnets if they came close to shore (not a common event for foraging leatherback turtles), or by shipping and petroleum-related accidents/discharges. There are no commercial trawlers operating in Kuwaiti waters.

#### 4.3 Protection of foraging areas

At the present there are no protected areas. The Department of Mari-culture and Fisheries, Food Resources Division of the Kuwait Institute for Science and Research has proposed five Kuwaiti islands as marine parks (Kubbar, Qaru, Bubiyan, Umm al-Muradum and part of Failaka), but no action has been taken to date.

Before the suspension of legislative activities in August 1990, as a result of Iraqi occupation, Kuwait was in the final stages of developing a detailed protected areas system.

To protect the ecological integrity of the coastal and marine environment, a peace park was proposed by the World Conservation Monitoring Centre, incorporating the headwaters and north-east shore of the Arabian Gulf (WCMC, 1991).

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

Amongst the various management constraints, perhaps the chief concern is the poor practical coordination between the various administrative and management bodies. Although active within the country, the applied activities of non-governmental conservation bodies appear to provide little input into protected areas conservation. Environmental problems, due to a number of factors, have been identified, principally population growth, urban expansion, industrialisation, transport and recreation and climate.

### **5. References**

- Al-Mohanna S, Meakins R (2000) First record of the leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*) in Kuwait. *Zoology in the Middle East*, 21, 27-29.
- Alsdirawi F (1991) Protected areas in the state of Kuwait. Caracas Action Plan. In 'Third Man and Biosphere Meeting on Biosphere Reserves in the Mediterranean and the First IUCN-CNPPA Workshop on Protected Areas in the North Africa-Middle East Region, 14-19 October 1991'. Tunis p. 10
- WCMC (1991) 'Gulf War Environmental Service: impact of atmospheric pollution on the terrestrial environment.' World Conservation Monitoring Centre, Cambridge, UK.