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NOTE ON DISTRIBUTION, VULNERABILITY AND PROTECTIVE MEASURES OF OLIVE GREEN RIDLEY TURTLE

Sea turtle is one of the endangered species of marine life and the need of protecting these species has gained importance in the recent years. In Andhra Pradesh, their distribution is limited to the north coastal districts of Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam and with sparse availability in some parts of the East Godavari District. Considering the abundance of distribution, the problem of threat to the turtle is more prone in Orissa and adjacent areas.

The turtles arrive annually off the coast for nesting purpose in the month of October/November and stay around in the waters till April/May in the following year. The females lay the eggs on the beaches during the month of January to May and they depart. The hatchlings emerge from the sands from February onwards and proceed straight to sea.

The greatest threat to the Olive Ridley turtles comes from the fishermen operating in the areas close to the coast. Due to the operation of mechanised and traditional fishing boats in the area, the turtles get trapped in the nets and are often mutilated to be released. Sometimes, the turtles caught in the nets will be brought to the shore as their meat is considered delicacy in certain areas. The eggs are also poached in large numbers for commerce as they are widely used as food. The eggs of the turtles as well as their young ones often fall prey to land predators like dogs, foxes and birds. Further the erection of shooting nets all along the sea coast for collecting shrimp seed on surf in many parts of the above coastal districts, is becoming obstacle to the movement of spawning turtles to the shore and young ones towards the sea. Besides, the increased activities of shrimp collection throughout the day by carrying petromax lanterns during night hours, the nocturnal natural egg laying phenomena of these animals is also being greatly disturbed. Though the existing MFR Act rules is not providing exclusively to contain the turtle catching, the section under 4(2)(b) of the APMFR Act provides to make rules for prohibition of turtle catching in need of conserving the fish

Turtle Excluder Device (TED) is a tool to avoid the incidental catching of turtles when the fish trawlers are in operation off the coast. Some of the NGOs working for the environmental conservation are demanding to make laws for mandatory use of TEDs to be fitted with the trawlers. In this regard, an expert scientific panel is constituted to carry out on the study on the distribution, incidental mortality of turtles and the use of turtle excluder devices along the coast of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh from 10th September 1999 onwards for which necessary cooperation of state government is sought in the matter.

Therefore all the coastal Asst. Directors of fisheries are instructed to associate themselves fully with the expert scientific panel for conducting the survey and to extend necessary cooperation by encouraging the private boat owners to participate in it.

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Commissioner of Fisheries