

## Olive ridley mortality in Gill nets in Orissa

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The photograph below is the most damning evidence yet of gill netting along the Orissa coast. The multi-filament net, with 205 dead turtles attached, was washed ashore on the afternoon of February 17, 2002 at the Gundalba beach on the Orissa coast. The turtles must have died about 7 or 8 days earlier and the net cut loose when the boat crew found it full of turtles. When members of 'Operation Kachhapa' reached the site on February 18th, the stench of the 205 rotting turtle carcasses was nearly unbearable.

Over the past 2 ½ months, over 10,000 dead olive ridley sea turtles have been washed ashore on the coast of Orissa. Turtle deaths within the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary are much lower this year, due to diligent patrolling within the Sanctuary. However, the slaughter outside the Sanctuary's boundaries has been appalling. This is entirely due to the lack of patrolling outside the Sanctuary and the fact that the law requiring the use of TEDs (which was enacted in December 1997) is still not being enforced.

WPSI's sea turtle conservation project, 'Operation Kachhapa', has provided two sea-going patrol boats. One is operating in the southern part of the Marine

Sanctuary, while the other has been patrolling from the mouth of the Devi River. Eight-four trawlers and gill netters have been seized since December 2001. However, despite the best efforts of the Forest Department, the Coast Guard and this turtle conservation programme, the turtle slaughter continues. More than 3,000 gill netters and trawlers continue to fish ½ to 2 km from the shore - outside the Marine Sanctuary but within the prohibited zone - every day, in direct contravention of the law.

The Orissa State government has consistently failed to protect sea turtles due to the powerful trawler lobby. It was recently discovered that the Orissa Fisheries Department has issued nearly 6,000 mechanised fishing licenses (5,000 licenses to gill netters, and 900 to trawlers), which is way above the quota of 1,000 licenses that was set by the State Government in 1984 in a notification under the Orissa Marine Fisheries Act.

A staggering 75,000 sea turtles are known to have been slaughtered off the Orissa coast over the last six years.

