GROUPE TORTUES MARINES FRANCE- BYCATCH WORKING GROUP
ACTIVITIES IN FRENCH WATERS

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SUMMARY

The Groupe Tortues Marines France (GTMF) created in 2007 by the French Ministry in charge of the Natural Environment aims to exchange information, to reflect and make propositions on all issues concerning the management of sea turtles in all French waters, including overseas, with links to the conservation actions at the international level. It is open to all the stakeholders of the marine turtle conservation in France and gathers to-date 170 members, who can exchange information through a web-list. The work of GTMF is organized into 3 main working groups (WG) concerning the following themes: by-catch reduction, public sensitization, and legislation and training. The main actions carried out by the by catch WG during these last years were to take stock of the situation of the sea turtles in the different French waters based on the analysis of a National questionnaire on various interactions of fisheries with sea turtles. Provisory maps on repartition of turtle strandings and catches were drawn with information on most impacting gears. Furthermore, posters to disseminate to fishers were also drawn to advise them on best ways to avoid mortality on board or during releasing. These actions were performed in partnership with the French department of fisheries.

RÉSUMÉ


RESUMEN

El Grupo de tortugas marinas Francia (GTMF) fue creado en 2007 por el Ministerio francés encargado del medio ambiente natural y tiene como objetivo intercambiar información y realizar propuestas sobre todos los temas relacionados con la ordenación de las tortugas marinas en aguas francesas, lo que incluye los territorios de ultramar, con vínculos a las acciones de conservación a nivel internacional. Está abierto a todas las partes interesadas en la conservación de las tortugas marinas en Francia y actualmente consta de 170 miembros, que pueden intercambiar información a través de una lista en la web. El trabajo del GTMF está organizado en tres grupos principales de trabajo sobre los siguientes temas: reducción de la

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captura fortuita, sensibilización pública y legislación y formación. Las principales acciones emprendidas por el Grupo de trabajo de captura fortuita durante estos últimos años han sido evaluar la situación de las tortugas marinas en las distintas aguas francesas, basándose en el análisis de un cuestionario nacional sobre diversas interacciones de las pesquerías con las tortugas marinas. Se elaboraron mapas provisionales sobre la distribución de las capturas y varapastos de tortugas con información sobre los artes que tienen más impacto. Además, se prepararon también carteles para distribuir entre los pescadores con el fin de asesorarles sobre las mejores formas de evitar la mortalidad a bordo o durante la liberación. Estas acciones se llevaron a cabo en asociación con el Departamento francés de pesca.

KEYWORDS
Caretta caretta, Dermochelys coriacea, French by catch Working Group, national survey, interactions with fisheries, artisanal fishing, coastal fisheries, gillnet, trawling, French waters, best practices, avoiding mortality

1. Introduction
Since 6 of the 7 sea turtle species occur on the French territory and because it hosts several of the most important nesting sites in the world, France has a high patrimonial responsibility for the conservation of these species. In order to enhance the efforts made on the overall national territory, the French Ministry in charge of the Natural Environment created the Groupe Tortues Marines France (GTMF) in 2007 which aims to exchange information, to reflect and make propositions on all issues concerning the management of sea turtles in all French waters, including overseas, with links to the conservation actions at the international level. The GTMF is open to all the stakeholders of the marine turtle conservation in France and gathers to-date 170 members, who can exchange information through a web list gtmf@mnhn.fr and during meetings, workshops, conferences and visio-conferences.

The work of GTMF is organized into 3 main working groups (WG) concerning the following themes which are of major importance regarding the conservation of sea turtles in France: by-catch reduction, public sensitization, and legislation and training. Compilations are also performed in order to describe the situation according to crucial issues like: the impact of light pollution, and that of marine debris on sea turtles in France (Claro and Hubert 2011, Claro and Bardonnet 2011).

2. Activities of the GTMF by-catch WG
In France, experts of the GTMF consider that one of the main threats for sea turtle conservation is mortality due to interactions with fisheries. In order to identify the most appropriate measures to be adopted regarding this issue, a GTMF by catch WG was constituted, which the following objectives:

• Exchange information and experiences on mitigating devices and measures
• Characterize incidental catches in French fisheries
• Compile published and unpublished information
• Contribute to developing surveys on French fishing vessels
• Study and promote feasibility of alternative fishing techniques (costs, benefits and training)
• Contribute to enhancing fisheries using modified gears (e.g. attribution of an eco-label)
• Educate and train in sea turtle reanimation and releasing techniques.

The first activity conducted by the GTMF by catch Working Group (WG) aimed to identify the situation of the sea turtles in the different French waters based on the analysis of a National questionnaire on various interactions of fisheries with sea turtles. The survey was conducted on continental France and overseas territories in collaboration with the French observation and stranding sea turtle networks, care/ rehabilitation centers, at sea research & observer programs, fishing organizations and national offices etc. The report was published in partnership with the French Ministry in charge of fisheries (Claro et al 2010).
The lack of detailed data was identified (i.e. including fishing effort) in part because of the low number of onboard observer programs, and even though substantial information came from data collected by stranding and observation networks and care centers, which work closely with artisanal fishermen. In the French Mediterranean region, where by catch were occasionally reported in driftnet fisheries before their ban in 2003 (Banaru et al. 2010), captures of loggerhead and leatherback turtles continue to be regularly observed in artisanal fisheries with trawlers and gillnets without being officially declared or outside any onboard observer program (see for example Delaugerre 1987, Oliver 2010, Senegas- CESTMed 2011 pers. com.). A survey questionnaire was experimented by GTMF, IFREMER and the local stranding network (Réseau Tortues Marines de Méditerranée Française- RTMMF) for reinforcing data collection and quality (Figure 1).

In the French Mediterranean region, coastal artisanal fisheries gillnetting and bottom trawling (Sacchi, are considered to have a major impact, in particular on loggerhead immature, on their migration route. The purpose of this experiment was to assess how the quality of these precious data could be enhanced in order to raise the level of by catch data which would become convenient for scientific analysis. At the end of this experiment, provisory maps on repartition of turtle strandings and catches could be drawn with information on most impacting gears (Figure 2) but numerous data could not be used because of lack of accuracy; this work suggested useful modifications to include in the questionnaire for further surveys. Posters for disseminating to fishermen were also drawn to advise Mediterranean fishermen on best ways to avoid mortality on board or during retrieval (Figures 3, 4). These placards were drawn after existing material (for example Gerosa and Aureggi 2001) and original ideas (IFREMER) inspired by the Mediterranean French fisheries context.

Other GTMF by catch WG activities consisted in providing technical advices to the Ministry in charge of Fisheries (ie tools to equip fishing vessels for safely handling and releasing sea turtles after accidental by catch) ; as well as providing comments on provisional Regional Fishery Management Organizations recommendations/resolutions.

Meetings, visioconferences with overseas territories, and workshops between stakeholders were also organized about priority activities which need to be performed for reducing interactions and their negative impact on sea turtles in the French waters. Recently, in May 2012, the GTMF organized with the Ministry in charge of Fisheries a workshop aiming to examine the possible contradictions between mitigation measures taken for protected marine vertebrate species (marine mammals, marine birds, sharks and sea turtles), and a further coordination of French expertise was decided, through a new network named RESOCAP.

3. Perspectives

According to the lack of data identified about the interactions between fisheries and sea turtles on the French territory, one of the further activities which are planned by the GTMF by catch WG is to stimulate and promote scientific research, not only sea turtle specific but also multi-taxonomic, in particular by the mean of new European teams such as Italy/Spain/France teams. This would be particularly consistent with the biology of sea turtles and other migratory vulnerable or endangered species, which are considered by the Convention on the conservation of Migratory Species (CMS), as well as with the European Marine Strategy Framework (MSF). Following the initial evaluation work, to which GTMF has contributed (Morizur et al., 2011) the monitoring of marine biodiversity and the impact of anthropogenic activities on the marine species population status will be necessary.

However, considering the emergency in reducing mortality of sea turtles due to fishery activities, the GTMF will, in parallel to this, continue to work with the French fishery and environmental authorities on the identification and prioritization of the mitigation measures which must be performed in the next future on the French territory. One of these will be to provide information and training material for fishermen, in particular videos and a guide of best practices in case of sea turtle accidental catch. GTMF by catch WG aims also to develop links with RFMOs, in the perspective of a fruitful collaboration.
References


Gerosa G. and Aureggi. 2001. Sea Turtle Handling Guidebook for Fishermen. 31p. Regional Activity Centre For Specially Protected Tunis, Tunisie


Figure 1. Questionnaire experimented in the Mediterranean French area for increasing quality and number of data collected about interactions between sea turtles and fisheries. RTMMF= Réseau Tortues Marines de Méditerranée française; GTMF= Groupe Tortues Marines France ; MNHN= Muséum national d’Histoire naturelle ; IFREMER= Institut Français de Recherche pour l'Exploitation de la MER.
Figure 2. Strandings of sea turtles and interactions of sea turtles with fishing devices on the French Mediterranean coast between 1991 and 2010 (data of Réseau Tortues Marines de Méditerranée Française and Banaru et al. 2011). In red = interactions with trawlers; in green = interactions with gillnets; in blue = interactions with liners; in pink = interactions with other fishing devices; in yellow = sea turtle strandings.
Figure 3. Releasing sea turtles caught during fishing activities, in the case of longliner; example of poster drawn for dissemination to fishermen, in order to reduce the mortality of by caught sea turtles.

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Figure 4. Releasing sea turtles caught during fishing activities, in the case of gillnet; example of poster drawn for dissemination to fishermen, in order to reduce the mortality of by caught sea turtles.

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