

Guidance Note

Handling Turtles in Sohar Industrial Port

Practical Guideline on how to act in case a turtle is spotted in areas with industrial activities that on short term endangers the individual turtle.

Note: this guideline is not a formal ministerial document and should be used for guidance only.

August 2009

Topics

- Introduction
- Responsibilities
- Turtle identification
- When to act
- How to handle turtles
- Releasing turtles
- Notification requirements
- Contacts and info points

Introduction

Today sea turtle populations around the world have become severely depleted. Saving the turtles is no easy task. Their habitat requirements range from undisturbed nesting beaches to feeding grounds such as sea grass beds, coral reefs, soft-bottom habitats and open ocean environments, where Leatherback turtles follow oceanic currents in search of jellyfish, and other seaturtle species also follow these currents in their migration routes between nesting and feeding grounds.

In the Sohar Industrial Port Area (SIPA), the industrial activities might result in a situation where there are immediate dangers for seaturtle, either by isolation in the harbor, damage by ships (collision, propellers), dredging works or jetty construction works.

Since turtles are endangered species, on sighting these individuals, anyone conducting works offshore must consider taking adequate action.

Common sense is the best advice in addition to compliance with certain regulations, and a sense responsibility.

Regulations

No seaturtle (including seaturtle carcasses) may be consumed or sold, regardless of its condition. A turtle that is caught during any operations may be landed, offloaded, transshipped or kept below the deck.

Such actions have several obvious benefits, including:

- Conserving endangered species
- Raising environmental awareness and credibility within the offshore industry.

Responsibilities

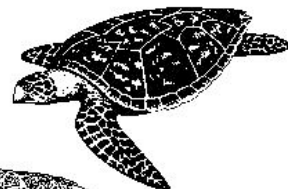
The skipper of a vessel, especially the locally operating vessels like tug-boats, dredging ships should instruct his staff on procedures and their first responsible on-board.

For sightings (from the water or from land) that require actions inside the harbor area, the harbor authorities are to be notified. The harbor authorities are responsible and must assess the need for action.

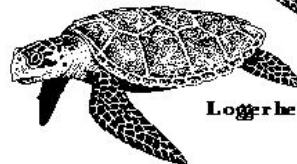
Turtle Identification

Seaturtles observed in Omani waters are: Hawksbill; Loggerhead; Green; Olive Ridley; and Leatherback.

Hawksbill



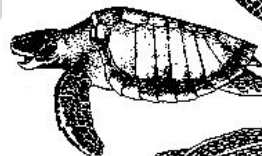
Loggerhead



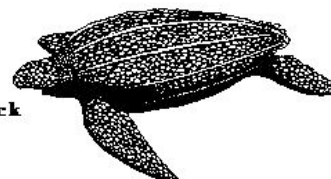
Green sea

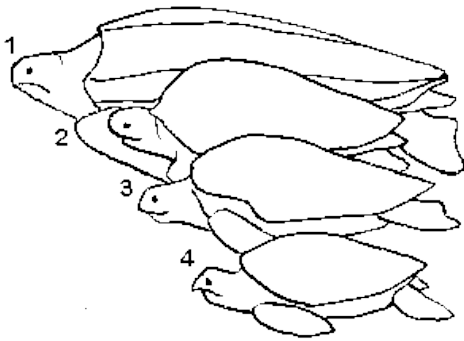


Olive Ridley



Leatherback





1. Leatherback *Dermochelys coreacea*
2. Loggerhead *Caretta caretta*
3. Green *Chelonia mydas*
4. Hawksbill *Eretmochelys imbricata*
5. Olive Ridley *Lepidochelys olivacea*

When to act

Main approach: Action is required when turtle needs care (e.g. when injured or entangled in net) or when there is eminent danger for the seaturtle (in harbor and not able to reach open sea, near dredging or near shore construction works).

How to handle turtles

If a seaturtle is hooked, owners and operators of longliners must use the required mitigation gear. Any hooked or entangled sea turtle must be handled in a manner that minimizes injury and promotes survival.

Sea turtles that cannot be brought aboard the vessel: In instances where a turtle is too large to be brought aboard, or the turtle cannot be brought aboard without causing further injury to the individual, the vessel owner or operator must disentangle and remove the gear, or cut the line as close as possible to the hook or entanglement to remove the maximum amount of the gear from the turtle, in order to ensure the turtle survival.

Seaturtles that can be brought aboard the vessel: In instances where a sea turtle is not too large (and therefore too heavy to handle) to be brought aboard, or the sea turtle can be brought aboard without causing further injury to the turtle, the vessel owner or operator must do the following:

- Immediately bring the sea turtle aboard;
- Disentangle and remove the gear, or cut the line as close as possible to the hook or entanglement, to remove the maximum amount of the gear from the turtle (avoiding removal of flippers, as bleeding would attract sharks);
- Resuscitate and release the sea turtle under the following regulations

Resuscitating turtles

If a sea turtle appears dead or in comatose, the following actions must be taken:

- Place the turtle on its belly so that its hindquarters are elevated at least 6 in from the ground for a period of no less than 4 hr and no more than 24 hr;

- Administer a reflex test at least once every 3 hr. This test is performed by gently touching the eye and/or pinching the tail of the turtle in order to determine if it is responsive; and/or
- Reanimate the seaturtle with cool water or wet sand.

Two basic categories of actions exists:

- 1: Free the animal from alien objects (hooks, nets) followed by release
- 2: Relocate the animal and release

The steps are as follows:

- Step 1 At sighting, assess the situation and conclude to take action or not to take action
- Step 2: Identify species
- Step 3: Check for obvious injuries
- Step 4: Consider relocation
- Step 5: Lift turtle on board with suitable materials
- Step 6: Release on suitable place
- Step 7: Report to authorities

During any transport keep turtle on its belly, as remaining long time on its back makes breathing difficult.

High freeboards of ships make it impossible to get a turtle on-board and assistance of smaller boats is required.

Releasing turtles

After handling a seaturtle in accordance with the requirements, the turtle must be returned to the ocean after identification. In releasing a turtle to the ocean the vessel owner or operator must:

- Place the vessel engine in neutral gear so that the propeller is disengaged and the vessel is stopped. Release the turtle away from deployed gear; and
- Observe that the turtle is safely away from the vessel before engaging the propeller and continuing operations.

Notification requirements

When a turtle is sighted and action is required, the harbor authorities have to be informed directly.

The SEU must be informed with a short notification that contains the following information: Date, time, contact details, actions taken, identified species, condition turtle, GPS coordinates, photo of the individual seaturtle (if possible: full body, head, tail).

Information

Contacts and notification points

Sohar Port Control: +968 26852777

SEU: meca.seu@gmail.com

MECA Natural Conservation:

Ali Al Rasbi 99346784

Ahmed Al Shukely 24404753

Oman turtles:

Ras Al Jinz Scientific and Visitor Centre:

<http://www.rasaljinz.org/>;

environment@rasaljinz.org

Educational:

<http://www.ioseaturtles.org/>

<http://www.starfish.ch/reef/marine-turtles>

<http://www.nizwa.net/env/turtles/turtles.html>

and

SEATURTLE IDENTIFICATION KEY FOR THE NW INDIAN OCEAN

