

**VANUATU NATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION ON SEA
TURTLES
2016 – 2020**

**A NATIONAL POLICY FOR THE PROTECTION, CONSERVATION,
MONITORING AND
MANAGEMENT OF SEA TURTLES**

Vanuatu Fisheries Department

July 2015

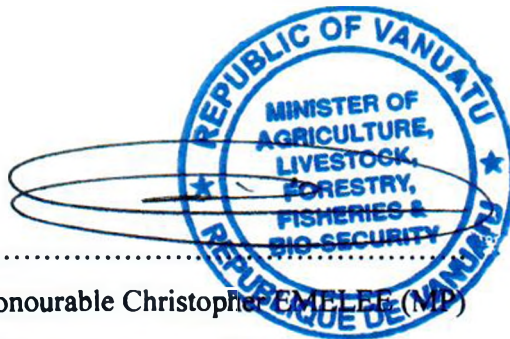
APPROVAL OF THE VANUATU NATIONAL ACTION PLAN ON SEA TURTLES

This National Action Plan on Sea Turtle is made in accordance with Part 4, Section 11 of the Fisheries Act No. 10 of 2014, is hereby approved on this date.

By virtue of powers conferred upon the Minister for Fisheries, under Part 4, Section 10(1) of the Fisheries Act No. 10 of 2014.

COMMENCEMENT DATE

By virtue of powers conferred upon the Minister responsible for Fisheries, under Section 6(1), 10(1) and 11(5) of the Fisheries Act No. 10 of 2014, Notice on the implementation of the Vanuatu National Action Plan on Sea Turtles is hereby given on ^{9th}.....day of July.....2015.



.....
Honourable Christopher ~~EMBLEE~~ (MP)

Minister Responsible for Fisheries

List of acronyms and abbreviations

CCAMLR	Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Marine Living Resources
CCSBT	Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna
CITES	Convention on international Trade on Endangered fauna and Flora
CMM	Conservation Management Measure
EAF	Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
IATFC	International Authorization to Fish Certificate
IATTC	Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission
ICCAT	International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna
IOTC	Indian Ocean Tuna Commission
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
IUU	Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated
MALFFB	Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry, Fisheries and Biosecurity
MARPOL	International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non- Governmental Organizations
NPOA	National Plan of Action
PAF	Precautionary Approach to Fisheries
RFMO	Regional Fisheries Management Organizations
SPREP	South Pacific Regional Environmental Program
SPRFMO	South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization
TED	Turtle Exclusion Devices
UNCLOS	United National Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNFSA	United Nation Fish Stocks Agreement
VFD	Vanuatu Fisheries Department
WCPFC	Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission
WCPO	Western Central Pacific Ocean
WSB	Wan Smol Bag Theatre

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1 Introduction

Sea turtle populations are threatened and endangered because of natural and human induced activities such as fishing operations. There is a need to control further increases in mortality of sea turtles associated with fishing vessels targeting tuna and tuna like species.

The *FAO Technical Guidelines to Reduce Sea Turtle Mortality in Fishing Operations* provides potential management actions and best practices for the safe release of sea turtles targeting Governments, NGOs and interest groups such as fishermen to adopt and implement to ensure turtle populations are protected. The Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) Conservation and Management Measure 2008-03 (CMM2008-03) on sea turtles also provide relevant mitigation measures towards effective management and reduction of fishing mortality on sea turtles. Implementation of measures emerged from other conventions such as CITES are also equally important.

1.1 Purpose and origin

The Republic of Vanuatu's National Plan of Action on sea Turtles (NPOA-Turtle) is a policy that seeks to protect, conserve and manage sea turtle populations in all Vanuatu waters, other jurisdictions as well as in areas beyond national jurisdiction where its flag fishing vessels are actively operating.

The Plan has been developed in accordance with the *FAO Technical Guidelines to Reduce Sea Turtle Mortality in Fishing Operations*. It will also assist Vanuatu in the implementation of the WCPFC CMM2008-03 and related measures in other conventions that Vanuatu is a party or non-contracting party.

Most importantly, this policy document is in line with the objectives of the Fisheries Act No. 10 of 2014, the overarching government policy, the Priority Action Agenda (PAA) document 2006- 2015 and the overall Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry, Fisheries and Biosecurity (MALFFB) Corporate Plan 2014 to 2018 and the Vanuatu Fisheries Department (VFD) 20/20 Strategy.

1.2 Scope

The scope of this policy document covers the following areas:

1. All Vanuatu flag fishing vessels;
2. All Vanuatu waters (internal waters, territorial waters, archipelagic waters and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)) as well as areas of Oceans where Vanuatu flag fishing vessels actively operate; and
3. Utilization of sea turtles for customary practices and food security, education, research and tourism purposes;

1.3 Guiding principles

The successful implementation of this Plan will depend on the following key principles and best practices.

1.3.1 Collaboration and partnership

This principle promotes a collaborative implementation of the Plan between the government and its key stakeholders such as communities, fishing companies, States and Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs).

1.4 Fisheries management principles

The implementation of the Vanuatu NPOA- Turtle will be implemented in accordance with the ecosystem and precautionary approaches.

1.4.1 Ecosystem approach to fisheries

This management principle entails an integrated management approach to fisheries that aims to balance diverse societal objectives, by taking account of the knowledge and uncertainties of biotic, abiotic and human components of ecosystems and their interactions within ecologically meaningful boundaries¹.

¹ FAO, 'Fisheries Management, 2. The Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries' *(Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries No 4 Suppl 2, FAO 2003) 14

1.4.2 Precautionary approach to fisheries

This management principle involves the application of prudent foresight, taking account of the uncertainties in fisheries systems and the need to take action with incomplete knowledge if such action could potentially prevent severe or irreversible harm to society or the environment².

2 Overview of sea turtles

Seven species of sea turtles have been recorded worldwide; they include the loggerhead turtles (*Caretta caretta*), the green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), the hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), the Kemp's ridley (*Lepdochelys kempi*), the olive ridley (*Lepdochelys olivacea*), the flatback (*Natator depressus*) and the leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*).

Of the seven species, five have been recorded to occur in Vanuatu waters and include loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*), the green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), the hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), the olive ridley (*Lepdochelys olivacea*), and the leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*).

2.1 Biology

All species of sea turtles are long-lived, slow-growing species, characterized by a complex life cycle and utilizing a wide range of habitats. Generally, sexual maturity is delayed in all species and varies between 20 to 50 years. Females lay eggs in nest dug in sandy beaches and lay about 50 to 130 eggs per nest. Hatchlings crawl to the sea and spend most of their life cycle in the open ocean but frequent the coast for feeding and breeding.

2.2 Food security

Sea turtles comprised a source of protein and form part of food security of the coastal communities of Vanuatu. However, consumptions of sea turtle are regulated under Sec. 59(2) of the Fisheries Regulation Order No. 28 of 2009. In 2012 a total number of 17 sea turtles were recorded to have been killed and consumed as part of traditional practices. This number increased to 24 the following year in 2013. With population growth, it is likely that consumption of sea turtles for traditional purposes will also increase.

² FAO, *Fisheries Glossary* Food and Agriculture Organization <<http://www.fao.org/fi/glossary/>>

2.3 Population status

Globally, sea turtle populations are vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Leatherback and Olive ridley are listed as vulnerable. Loggerhead and Green turtle as endangered and Hawksbill and Kemp's ridley are listed as critically endangered.

In Vanuatu, sea turtle population are unknown, but data from a tagging programme implemented since 2000 indicated that about 119 turtles are tagged annually from year 2000 to 2014.

2.4 Threats

Sea turtle populations are prone and subjected to a wide range of threats attributed to their long life span, habitation of several types of habitats and extensive distribution in terms of distances. Such threats occur both in terrestrial as well as marine and constitute natural and human induced threats.

On land, the threats to sea turtle populations include killing sea turtles for meat or shells, collection of eggs by both human and animals, predation of eggs and hatchling by animals and destruction or occupation of nesting beaches for development projects. At sea and in the marine environment, threats include effects of climate change, interactions through fishing activities and pollution.

Interaction due to fishing activities is one of the greatest threats to sea turtle population where they are unintentionally caught in fishing gears. Longline, trawl and gillnet are some of the gears with high unintentional catch rates. Effective monitoring is still a challenge contributing to limited knowledge on the level of interactions, which in turn influenced by the lack of data and information on such interactions.

Sea turtles are still sought after for their meat and shells and with the ever expansion of development projects in the coastal areas, sea turtle nesting sites and feeding grounds continue to come under continuous threats. In addition, with the increasing expansion in the fishing industry, sea turtle populations face a lot danger into the future.

3 Key challenges

Vanuatu issues a significant number of licenses to longline fishing vessels and any other fishing vessel types. At least 90 per cent of all fishing licenses are issued to foreign vessels (average 130) and are mainly for longline fishing operations within the EEZ. Turtle bycatch

in the longline fishery is therefore a key challenge and longline fishing operations is one of the key threats to sea turtle populations. Table 1 below showed total number of fishing license issued per year for fishing within Vanuatu's EEZ.

Table 1: Total number of fishing licenses per year from 2010 to 2014 for fishing and fishing related activities within Vanuatu waters

Year	Type of Fishing License			Total
	Foreign	Locally-based	Local	
2010	154	4	13	171
2011	171	3	8	182
2012	107	4	14	125
2013	75	2	10	87
2014	66	-	12	78

Vanuatu is a flag state and issues International Authorization to Fish certificates (IATFC) to its fishing fleet operating in different oceans that are managed under various RFMOs, which Vanuatu is either a party to, cooperating member or observer. In 2014, there were a total of 134 Vanuatu flag vessels active and fishing in different oceans of the world. Table 2 below showed the number of Vanuatu flag vessels authorized to conduct fishing and fishing related activities in the different RFMOs from 2010 to 2014.

Table 2: Total number of Vanuatu flag fishing vessels authorized to conduct fishing and fishing related activities from 2010 to 2014.

Year	Fishing vessel category							Total
	Longliner	Carrier	Purse Seiner	Squid jigger	Trawler	Light Boat	Pole & Line	
2010	18	24	2	2	4	-	-	50
2011	54	20	3	1	-	-	-	78
2012	67	27	2	3	2	-	-	100
2013	77	31	15	3	2	1	1	128
2014	86	30	9	5	2	1	1	134

Vanuatu is either a party to, cooperating member or observer to the following Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs): Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC); Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC); International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT); Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC); Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT); South Pacific Fisheries Management Organization (SPRFMO) and Commission for the

Conservation of Antarctic Living Marine Resources (CCALMR). Table 3 illustrates interactions of Vanuatu flag longline and purse seine vessels with the Western Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) from 2005 to 2013.

Table 3: Turtle interactions by Vanuatu flag longline and purse seine fishing vessels within the WCPO from 2010 to 2013

Category	Gear	Year	Species	Fate			Life status		
				Number	Retain	Discard	Alive	Dead	Unknown
Marine turtle	S	2005	Marine turtle (unidentified)	2	0	2	0	0	2
Marine turtle	S	2005	Olive ridley	1	0	1	0	0	1
Marine turtle	S	2006	Olive ridley	1	0	1	0	0	1
Marine turtle	S	2007	Olive ridley	1	0	1	0	0	1
Marine turtle	LL	2009	Loggerhead turtle	1	0	1	0	0	1
Marine turtle	S	2010	Loggerhead turtle	1	0	1	1	0	0
Marine turtle	S	2010	Loggerhead turtle	2	0	2	0	0	2
Marine turtle	LL	2011	Leatherback turtle	1	0	1	1	0	0
Marine turtle	S	2011	Green turtle	1	0	1	0	0	1
Marine turtle	S	2011	Hawksbill turtle	6	0	6	0	0	6
Marine turtle	S	2011	Loggerhead turtle	3	0	3	0	0	3
Marine turtle	S	2012	Olive ridley	2	0	2	0	0	2
Marine turtle	S	2013	Hawksbill turtle	3	0	3	0	0	3

Vanuatu is also a party or signatory to the following international and regional treaties related to sea turtles: United Nation Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement (UNFSA), Convention on the International Trade in fauna and Flora (CITES), MARPOL, Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) and the South Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (SPREP).

Vanuatu faces a significant challenge in monitoring and collecting the required information for the protection, conservation and management of sea turtles. This is critical because it calls

to question the competence and ability of Vanuatu to implement and deliver on its responsibilities, commitments and obligations including those regarding sea turtles, as both a coastal and flag state.

In 2012, Vanuatu was issued with a Yellow Card by the European Union (EU) for failing to put in place effective control measures for the management of its Vanuatu flag fleet. Vanuatu has revised and strengthened its domestic policies and legislations thereby demonstrating its efforts to address the above challenges including a platform for the effective implementation of international and regional measures on the reduction of sea turtle mortality.

4 Vanuatu legislative and regulatory framework

The primary legal instrument for the management, development, protection and conservation of fisheries resources in Vanuatu including turtles is the Fisheries Act No. 10 of 2014. The Fisheries Regulation Order No. 28 of 2009 provides the regulatory framework.

- I. Section 59 of the Fisheries Regulation Order No. 28 of 2009 prohibits the taking, killing, consuming, possessing, exporting, selling or purchasing of three marine turtles that frequent the archipelago including the leatherback turtle (*Dermochelyes coriacea*), hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelyes imbricate*) and the green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*). Furthermore, it prohibits the consumption of eggs and interfering with nesting turtles.

- II. Section 59(2) provides for an exemption for the use of education and research. Given a strong cultural and traditional link to sea turtles, the exemption clause also provides for the use of sea turtles but only for customary practices. The exemption clause further sets out a process where people wishing to use sea turtles for this purpose must follow to allow for the Director of Vanuatu Fisheries Department (VFD) to grant request. Given the geographical nature of the Vanuatu archipelago, effective monitoring and data collection on sea turtle use remains a challenge.

Other relevant instruments that contribute to fisheries management in Vanuatu include the Decentralization and Local Government Regions Act (1997), the Environmental Protection and Conservation Act CAP 283, the International Trade (fauna and flora) Act Cap 210, the

Maritime Zone Act No. 6 of 2010 and the Vanuatu Foreign Investment Promotion Act No. 15 of 1998, as follows:-

- I. The Decentralization and Local Government Act empowers the provinces to pass “by-laws” to regulate and issue fishing license within their six miles provincial waters;

The Environmental Protection and Conservation Act CAP 283 contain a range of general provisions relating to the protection and conservation of environment. It provides for the establishment of community conservation areas as well as a need for environmental impact assessment (EIA). Sea turtles are listed as a significant species to be protected under conservation and tabu areas management plans. Finally, section 45(1) (f) allows the minister responsible to make regulations in relation to the control and taking of specified species and 2 (b) provides for regulating the harvesting of natural resources. Such provisions could contribute indirectly to the protection and conservation of sea turtles.

- II. The International Trade (fauna and flora) Act Cap 210 provides for issuance of CITES permit on international trade on fauna and flora. However, all sea turtle species are listed under CITES Appendix I, meaning international trade in sea turtles whether live or dead, their products or derivatives is not allowed.
- III. The Maritime Zone Act establishes a series of zones of the Vanuatu waters from the archipelagic baseline. The archipelagic baseline is the line from which the seaward limits of a State's territorial sea, contiguous zone and the EEZ are measured;
- IV. The Vanuatu Foreign Investment Promotion Act provides for the activities and industries reserved exclusively for citizens of Vanuatu. For instance, in the fisheries sector, fishing within the archipelagic waters within the meaning of the Maritime Zone Act is reserved for Ni- Vanuatu.

5 Current state of management of sea turtles in Vanuatu

The VFD is the government agency mandated to implement and enforce the provisions of the Fisheries Act and fisheries regulations. However, for sea turtles, the protection, conservation,

management and monitoring is done in close collaboration with a local NGO, the Wan Smol Bag (WSB) theatre. WSB has a countrywide network of Turtle Monitors (now termed 'Vanua-Tai Resource Monitors'). The management collaboration is facilitated through a signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the VFD and WSB which sets out the duties and responsibilities of both parties in relation to the protection, conservation and management of sea turtles.

One of the activities under the MOU is the monitoring of sea turtle population in Vanuatu through tagging program. This program activity is jointly implemented by VFD and WSB supported by SPREP. From 2000 to 2014, tagging data showed an average of 119 turtles tagged every year.

Vanuatu is a party to the WCPFC and as such obligated to implement the provisions of the WCPFC CMM2008-03 on sea turtles. Through this measure, Vanuatu requires its flag vessels to, amongst other things, use mitigation measures identified in the Measure, record and report all turtle interactions, incidents and bycatch in its WCPFC Part I report annually to the Commission. Monitoring mechanisms such as observer and catch logs have been implemented both on all licensed foreign and Vanuatu flag vessels. Offloading and transshipment in ports also provide for monitoring and verification on sea turtle bycatches.

Future monitoring against turtle mitigation measures and domestic requirements would be further strengthened and improved through routine at sea boarding and inspection, coupled with electronic monitoring and reporting. These are important efforts to ensure compliance in all fishing operations in Vanuatu EEZ, particularly all Vanuatu flag vessels active in the high seas and other jurisdictions.

Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing pose significant threats to sea turtle populations given that vessels deemed as IUU vessels will mostly likely not implement measures to protect, conserve and management sea turtle populations. In 2014, Vanuatu put in place procedures in the Vanuatu International Fleet Management Plan in relation to registration of fishing vessels wishing to be considered for registration in the Vanuatu Registry. IUU is high on the list of selection criteria that operator(s)/owner(s) must declare that the vessel has not and will not engage in any IUU fishing activities. There are guidelines in place to inspect and check on vessels covered under licensing applications. Vanuatu has

also put in place necessary legal provisions and will impose this on any of its vessels found to be involved in any IUU fishing related activities. All these efforts will strengthen Vanuatu's flag state responsibility over its flagged fishing vessels.

6 Policy issues

The key policy issues that this policy document aims to address in the effort to protect, conserve and manage sea turtles are outlined below:

6.1 Policy goals and actions

Policy goal 1: Strengthen monitoring and data collection by large offshore commercial vessels

Monitoring, data collection of bycatches, discards and interactions of sea turtles is one of the policy issues that Vanuatu needs to address. It needs to develop and strengthen monitoring and data collection mechanism to ensure effective capture of information on sea turtle interactions, bycatch and discards from fishing operations.

Policy actions:

- Implement observer coverage of longliners (5%), purse seiners (100%), carriers (100%) as stipulated under the Revised Tuna Fishery Management Plan 2014 and a minimum of 10% on trawlers;
- Mandatory completion and submission of catch logs and observer reports that include sea turtles interaction by species; and
- Require vessels operators to record all incidents involving sea turtles during fishing operations and report such incidents to VFD.

Policy goal 2: Decrease mortality and incidental catches from large offshore commercial vessels

Fishing operation activities especially from longline, purse seine and trawl fishery represent the greatest threat to sea turtle populations. Vanuatu as a coastal state as well as flag state

engages in all of these fisheries³. Data on Vanuatu flag vessels operating within the WCPO indicate some level of interaction during fishing operations. Between 2005 and 2013, there were a total of 25 interactions from both longline and purse seine fishing operations, an average of 3 interactions per year.

Despite this low interaction rate, it is still an issue that needs to be addressed. Vanuatu will adopt appropriate policy actions to ensure that such interactions do not result in harm or death of sea turtles.

Policy actions:

- Amend and expand logsheet field to include sea turtle interactions;
- Implement turtle exclusion devices (TED) on trawl fishery;
- Provide appropriate training to observers and vessel crews to ensure proper monitoring and implementation of TED;
- To the extent practicable, avoid encirclement of sea turtles, and if a sea turtle is encircled or entangled, take practicable measures to safely release the turtle;
- To the extent practicable, release all sea turtles observed entangled in fish aggregating devices (FADs) or other fishing gears;
- If a sea turtle is entangled in the net, stop net roll as soon as the turtle comes out of the water; disentangle the turtle without injuring it before resuming the net roll;
- Provide instructions in turtle release procedures in appropriate language on all fishing vessels;
- To the extent practicable, assist the recovery of the turtle before returning it to the water;
- Ensure appropriate turtle recovery training to be provided to vessel crews;
- Carry and employ dip nets, when appropriate, to handle turtles;

³ Vanuatu EEZ is not a traditional purse seine fishery waters. There is no trawl fishery within the Vanuatu waters.

- Ensure that the operators of all longline vessels carry and use line cutters and de-hookers to handle and promptly release sea turtles caught or entangled;
- Ensure that operators of purse seine vessels are, where appropriate, required to carry and use dip-nets;
- Require longline vessels to use only large circle hooks, which are fishing hooks that are generally circular or oval in shape and originally designed and manufactured so that the point is turned perpendicularly back to the shank. These hooks shall have an offset not to exceed 10 degrees;
- Require its longline vessels to only use whole finfish for bait; and
- Require and encourage vessel operators to use any other measure, capable of further reducing the interaction rate.

Policy goal 3: Strengthen monitoring and data collection within coastal waters

Monitoring and data collection on sea turtles is a challenge in Vanuatu. Over the years in partnership with NGOs and communities an active community based turtle monitoring and conservation activities have been established across the country making Vanuatu one of the turtle conscious countries in the region. This policy goal is to maintain this progress and improve where necessary towards community monitoring and data collection on sea turtles and their habitat, nesting females and nesting sites in Vanuatu coastal zones.

Policy Actions:

- Maintain and review collaboration with NGO partners, local governments, communities and any interest groups in the assessment and information flow of sea turtle populations in coastal areas around the archipelago;
- VFD is to work with provincial government on by-laws pertaining to turtle conservation and management;
- VFD is to work in close collaboration with WSB Vanua-Tai resource monitors, community groups and Fisheries Community Authorized Officers⁴ on sea turtle monitoring and management;

⁴ Authorized Officer pursuant to Section 108 of the Fisheries Act No.10 of 2014

- Promote community based monitoring and data collection of adults, nesting females, species, nests and hatchlings and damages;
- VFD is to work with communities that utilize sea turtles for customary practices and food security to keep good records of the number of turtles harvested in one year;
- Tagging and release and recording of turtles caught in nets, lines, enclosures or nesting females; and
- Recording of species, size, sex and location of all turtles killed for customary practices.

Policy Goal 4: Exemption on turtle consumption for cultural practices, education, research and tourism

Harvesting and use of sea turtles is part of subsistence food security, cultural significance, education and research and tourism. Existing turtle regulation (Order No. 28 of 2009) exempts the use of sea turtles for customary practices, education and research through authorization by the Director of VFD upon request. Given the geographical spread of the islands, turtle monitoring and data collection is a challenge. Partnerships with NGOs and communities in Vanuatu have established an active community based turtle monitoring and conservation activities across the country. This policy goal sets the process for applying the exemption of use of sea turtles in Vanuatu coastal waters for customary practices, education and research and tourism.

Policy actions:

- Application for exemption on sea turtle use is to be made to the Director of VFD by recognised community leader in writing on a prescribed form;
- Authorization for exemption on sea turtle use and captivity is to be issued by way of a prescribed permit upon satisfying certain requirements and criteria;
- VFD is to work with Vanuatu Cultural Centre to identify and verify coastal communities with traditional practices of using sea turtles;
- Information contained in the permit can include species to be harvested, number of pieces, size, sex and location, purpose of harvest, method of fishing with certain conditions as required by the Director;

- Fisheries authorized officer and WSB Vanua-Tai resource monitors are responsible to witness the event and record the information in a form;
- An exemption of sea turtle use for the purposes of tourism will be legislated and regulated;
- Review of fisheries regulation should cover the regulation of olive ridly and loggerhead turtles;
- VFD will work with communities to determine harvest quota for customary purposes; and
- Sale of any turtle meat or other body parts including shells (carapace) or eggs is prohibited.

Policy goal 5: Cooperation in sea turtle conservation

Vanuatu is an active Sea turtle conservation country. Uncontrolled killing of sea turtles declined through collaborative effort of government, communities and non-government effort and has led to preserving existing populations. Enactment of sea turtle regulation in 2009 is testament to Vanuatu's national commitment to protect this important and national treasure.

Policy actions:

- Relevant government agencies to maintain cooperation with NGO partners and communities on protection and conservation of sea turtle in Vanuatu waters;
- National agencies to cooperate with neighbouring countries and regional partners in regional management and monitoring of sea turtles where necessary;
- Coastal communities to continue active participation in protection of sea turtles in marine protected areas, feeding grounds and special protection of nesting sites and nesting females;
- VFD is to work with interested communities, other government agencies and NGOs to protect sea turtles and nesting sites; and

- Government and NGO partners to maintain cooperation under existing MOU on sea turtle conservation and community turtle monitoring support. The signed MOU between the VFD and WSB which sets out the duties and responsibilities of both parties in relation to the protection, conservation and management of sea turtles; and

Policy goal 6: Improve awareness, education and outreach on sea turtles

For effective protection, conservation and management of sea turtles, information on sea turtle biology, habitat range including threats and their overall role in the ecosystem must be made available to the general public, schools, communities but most importantly fishermen.

Vanuatu authorities must ensure that information with regards to gear restrictions and other measures adopted aimed at protecting; conserving and managing of sea turtle must be delivered in a timely manner to its fishing industry and other stakeholders. This is crucial to ensure smooth, timely and effective implementation as well as for compliance purposes.

Policy actions:

- Develop in partnership with its stakeholders awareness materials on sea turtle biology, habitat range, threats, role and importance of sea turtles to a healthy ecosystem;
- Disseminate awareness materials to schools, communities, local fishermen and fishing industry;
- Promote turtle guardian programme with interested schools or school environment/science clubs who can be involved in making awareness with communities and other schools;
- Train Rural Fisheries Development Officers stationed in the provinces in turtle biology, habitat range, threats, role and importance of sea turtles to a healthy ecosystem and provide them with appropriate awareness materials to disseminate to communities; and
- Conduct awareness programs through workshops, radio talk shows, TV, website and newspapers.

Policy goal 7: Research and training

Research and training is a crucial part in the process leading up to developing short, medium and long- term management measures towards the protection, conservation and management

of sea turtles. Vanuatu will strive to build its capacity through training as well as partnerships with its stakeholders for such purpose.

In partnership with its private sector and other institutions, Vanuatu will endeavour to undertake or support research in relation to developing or promoting gears that would encourage safe release of sea turtles.

Policy actions:

- Build and improve knowledge in sea turtles through formal training as well as through on the job partnership arrangements;
- Encourage post graduate scholarships on the science and management of bycatch in tuna fisheries including sea turtles;
- Endeavour to undertake or support research in relation to developing or promoting gears that would encourage safe release of sea turtles including biology and ecological status of sea turtle;
- Undertake to support research trials of circle hooks and other mitigation methods in longline fisheries;
- Provide capacity building to educational (tourism) facilities that are licensed to maintain captive turtles and collect annual data on species and numbers held in captivity, place where hatchlings are collected, mortality in captivity and other relevant management data; and
- to limit light pollution on turtle nesting beaches adjacent to waterfront subdivisions or tourist resorts; light pollution may be minimized by; i) turning lights to face inland instead of on the nesting area; ii) lowering the height of the lights; iii) using low wattage lights (e.g. mood lighting); planting bushes or screening trees between lights and nesting beaches;

7 Review

This National Action Plan could be reviewed, amended and updated from time to time. However, the document has a lifespan of four years after which it will be reviewed in its entirety.