



# NEWSLETTER

## REGIONAL NORTHWEST ATLANTIC LEATHERBACK ACTION PROJECT

ISSUE 6 | SEPTEMBER 2023 – JANUARY 2024

This newsletter provides our stakeholders with updates and the next steps of the Regional Northwest Atlantic Leatherback Action Plan (RAP) Project in the region, focusing on French Guiana, Suriname, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago.

### UPDATES

#### MONTHLY WORKING GROUP MEETINGS

The monthly working group update meetings for the RAP continued. The meetings were led by WWF-Guianas (Suriname and Guyana) with the representatives of the partner organizations, which are the Environmental Management Authority (EMA) in Trinidad and Tobago, French Office of Biodiversity (OFB), and WWF-France in French Guiana, WIDECAST and WWF-Netherlands to discuss the progress and implementation of the project.

#### REGIONAL IUU MEETING

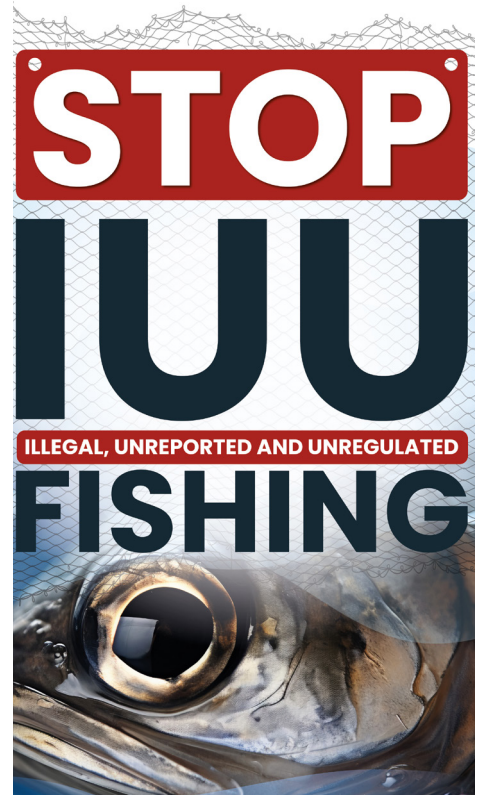


The Fisheries Departments of Guyana, Suriname, and the Fisheries Committee of French Guiana, in partnership with WWF-Guianas, held their first-ever regional meeting aimed at fostering collaboration to end Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing in Guianas. This two-day meeting was hosted in Guyana on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of November, 2023.

Through funding from Oceans-5, the regional meeting evaluated and explored potential paths for collaboration to clarify and enhance efforts to combat IUU fishing and to maintain the sustainability of fisheries at the Guianas Shield level. IUU fishing practices in the Guianas region pose severe threats to fisheries resources, the livelihoods and food supply of coastal communities, and the survival of marine ecosystems and protected species like the leatherback. | [Link Article](#)

#### REGIONAL WORKSHOP MEETING REPORT

On 16 June 2023, the Regional Meeting on the implementation and adaptation of the NWA Leatherback Regional Action Plan was hosted online. The meeting report was finalized after input from attendees, and the final report can be downloaded [Here](#) and on the WIDECAST [web page](#) dedicated to the RAP.







## COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS FRENCH GUIANA

### NATIONAL DIALOGUE

The National Action Plan (NAP) for marine turtles in French Guiana ran for ten years, from 2014 to 2023. Having ended last year, it's time to take stock. The ACTeon consultancy firm was selected to carry out the assessment: the aim is to measure the successes and strengths of the plan and areas for improvement. In particular, the consultancy will organize interviews with the main stakeholders and will conclude whether it is necessary to have a new action plan.

From September 2023 to January 2024, three strategic meetings were held as part of the NAP: the working group on environmental education (on October 10, 2023), the working group on threat reduction on land (on December 5, 2023) and the working group on threat reduction at sea (on January 19, 2024). Some twenty stakeholders provided updates on their activities, including those aligned with the RAP's strategic lines and actions.



### 2023 NESTING SEASON



From January to September 2023, sea turtle nesting activity was monitored in Awala-Yalimapo by the Amana Nature Reserve, in Kourou by the OFB and in Cayenne/Rémire-Montjoly by Kwata NGO. With over 1600 leatherback nests counted, the results are encouraging compared with the previous year, but many threats remain. In 2023, global warming had a particularly dramatic impact on the nests. Erosion caused by rising sea levels dug up and swept away many of the eggs still incubating, and the high temperatures prevented most of the hatchlings from developing fully. A [Press Release](#) detailing the number of clutches and threats for each site and species was published in October and translated into English.





COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS FRENCH GUIANA

KAWANA HATCHERY IN AWALA-YALIMAPO



The leatherback turtle nesting activity on Yalimapo Beach, once known as the world’s largest nesting site for this species, has declined by an alarming 95% in just 20 years. To help halt this decline as much as possible, members of the Marine Turtle Network in French Guiana (RTMG) set up this natural hatchery on this beach in 2023. Poaching, erosion, and predation by dogs are the main threats. To counter these, specially trained staff are responsible for moving and securing leatherback eggs in the hatchery throughout the egg-laying season. The nests remain in the sand throughout the incubation period until emergence. In 2023, 26 nests were relocated, and the hatchery will be reopened in 2024 as soon as the first leatherbacks arrive. This project is led by Kwata NGO in partnership with the Amana Nature Reserve, WWF France, OFB, CNRS, the government (DGTM) and the territorial collectivity (CTG).

LAUNCH OF PALICA III PROJECT IN CAYENNE/RÉMIRE-MONTJOLY

Regarding reducing bycatch, French Guiana’s professional fisherfolks are always the first to mobilize. The PALICA II project (“Pêcheries Actives pour la Limitation des Interactions et des Captures accidentelles”) ended in June 2023, and the four experimental nets tested gave very promising results. This project also reaffirmed the significant role played by professional fishermen in protecting sea turtles. Indeed, the socio-professionals are most in contact with the animals in their natural environment and are currently seeking technical solutions to reduce the threats posed at sea to the large marine vertebrates of the Guiana Shield. PALICA II also revealed that illegal foreign fishing vessels in French Guianese waters represent by far the greatest threat regarding accidental catches.

On the strength of these results, stakeholders have decided to continue their work, and PALICA III was officially launched on January 31, 2024. Led by the Fisheries Committee (CRPMEM) and WWF in French Guiana, in partnership with Kwata, Ifremer and CNRS, PALICA III proposes to continue selectivity tests, to extend them to other fishing gears, to test professional coastal line fishing, to limit the threat of ghost nets and to more closely monitor the Olive Ridley turtle population from Cayenne and Rémire-Montjoly.

COMMUNICATION & ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION



A lot has been going on for Réseau Tortues Marines Guyane (RTMG) in recent months. First, several awareness-raising and cleanup events organized, including World Cleanup Day, Green Days and the Science Festival. Moreover, educational signs have also been inaugurated at the entrances to the beaches of Rémire-Montjoly and Kourou, enabling passers-by to quickly learn about sea turtles, their vulnerability, and the right gestures to adopt in their presence. The RTMG continues to work with schoolchildren and, in particular, is carrying out a project with students from the Matiti High School, with the aim of surveying users of French Guianese nesting sites on their level of awareness of marine turtles. A new episode of the RTMG web series was released in December, presenting the missions of French Guiana’s OFB Departmental Service - link to [Episode 4](#) of the RTMG web series. Finally, the latest [RTMG Newsletter](#) was released in January 2024, summarizing the actions carried out by French Guiana stakeholders in recent months.





COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS | SURINAME

IUU-PATROLS



The Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) activities of the Fisheries Department Suriname to combat IUU officially started on November 7th 2023, via a kick-off launch and demonstration on the patrol vessel for actual MCS inspection. Participants apart from WWF-Guianas included the French Embassy in Suriname, the Maritime Authority Suriname, the Maritime Police, and the local fishers' organizations. This was part of the grant provided by WWF-Guianas to the Fisheries Department funded by WWF-NL.

Link to [Media Article](#)



Two joint patrol missions were successfully conducted in the fishing area between the Paramaribo, Suriname and the transboundary Marowijne river through a collaboration among WWF team (in Suriname and French Guiana), Maritime Police, Suriname and French CRPMEM (Regional Maritime Committee for Fisheries and Aquaculture, based in French Guiana). The missions detected two IUU vessels and provided the opportunity to identify patrol constraints and means for improvement.



COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS SURINAME

BYCATCH DATA COLLECTION FOR GILLNET FLEET

As part of the grant from WWF-Guianas to the Fisheries Department in Suriname, five suitable captains of gillnet vessels signed contracts with the Fisheries Department of Suriname for testing onboard monitoring of catch composition and bycatch using the open-source software KoboToolbox for digital, offline data collection onboard using tablets until end of September 2024.



TAKING ACTION AGAINST ILLEGAL SETTLEMENTS AT BRAAMSPUNT NESTING BEACH



After several warnings to the fishers, on December 24, the Commissariat Commewijne (CC), in collaboration with NCD and the Police, took action to dismantle four illegal settlements located on the turtle nesting area at Braampunt. The operation was carried out to preserve the natural habitat of the area and to protect the nesting grounds of various species of turtles. The operation was conducted smoothly, and no incidents were reported.

SMART FOR SEA TURTLES

The two-year piloting MOU of the Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART) at Galibi has been validated by the partners NCD, WWF-Guianas and the NZCS/CMO with the UNDP as an observer and is expected to sign shortly following legal review. The conditions to enable SMART in Galibi are in place. The 4.8 kWp PV system can be remotely monitored due to the 2-year internet data package sponsorship agreement between WWF-Guianas and Telesur. This made it possible for the partners

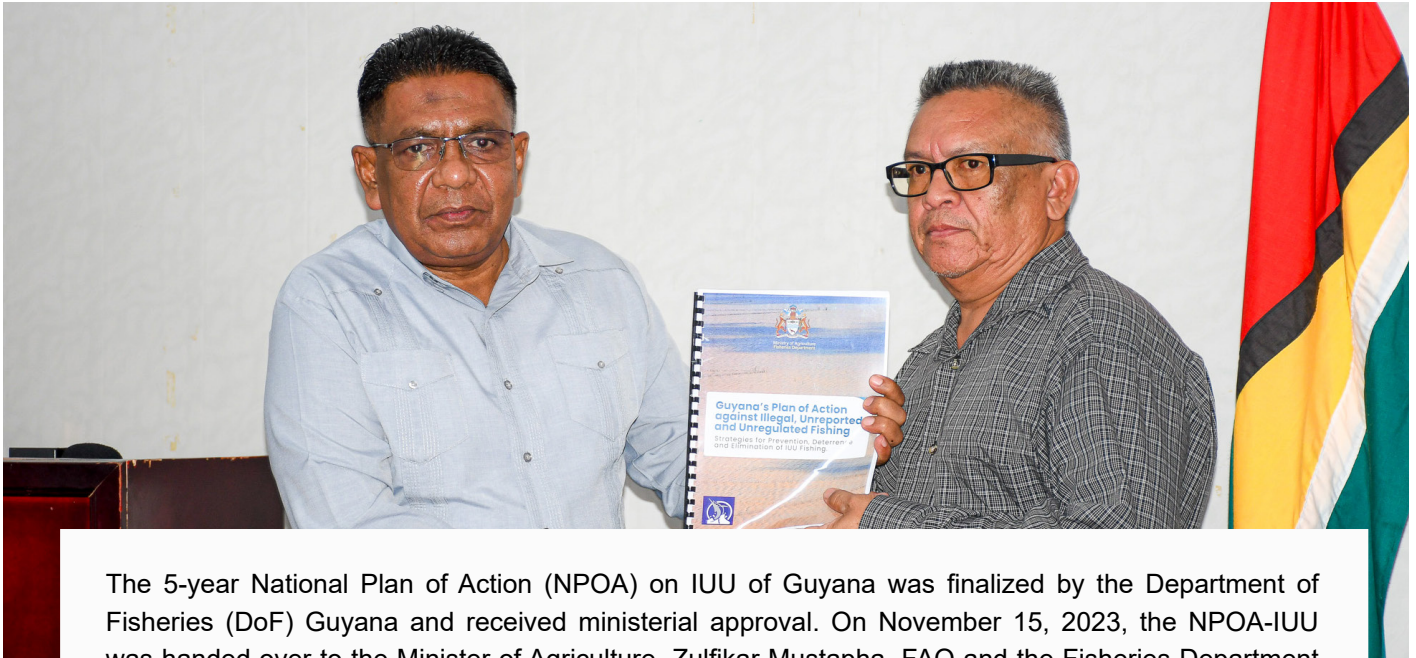
to communicate and report effectively. The mobile renewable energy equipment was donated to NCD, which enables the use of SMART on the nesting beaches in Galibi.

- The final draft of the SMART Data model for sea turtle data collection has been developed and is being reviewed by WWF-Guianas and WWF SMART experts
- WWF-Guianas and NCD have presented the smart data model for sea turtles in Suriname to the WWF offices in Fiji and Malaysia as part of a learning exchange.



COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS **GUYANA**

IUU



The 5-year National Plan of Action (NPOA) on IUU of Guyana was finalized by the Department of Fisheries (DoF) Guyana and received ministerial approval. On November 15, 2023, the NPOA-IUU was handed over to the Minister of Agriculture, Zulfikar Mustapha. FAO and the Fisheries Department facilitated the development of the NPOA, and WWF provided technical support and printed the NPOA and IUU banners to facilitate stakeholders' awareness in Guyana. This was funded through the donor Oceans 5, a sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors and WWF-NL. Some key measures to address IUU as per the NPOA:

- Increase MCS and enforcement of foreign-flagged fishing vessels
- Develop an NPOA for sharks, considering IUU activities, shark conservation and management
- Improve fisheries inspection and auditing of vessels and processing facilities by training Fisheries, Maritime, Customs and Veterinary Public Health Unit (VPHU) officials
- Full implementation of VMS monitoring across all sectors
- Adopt and implement measures on the marking and identification of fishing vessels in order to improve transparency and allow better identification of non-compliant vessels

As part of the Oceans 5 funded project “Combatting Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing in Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana (the Guianas)”, a consultant has been hired to address the common threats posed by IUU and to explore potential means of collaboration to combat IUU. Following the first regional meeting mentioned above, the consultant returned to conduct additional consultations with participants and fisherfolks. Consultations were done with over 70 fisherfolks across Regions 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 from January 15 to 19, 2024. The aim was to collect historical data on fishing efforts (net length, mesh size, days at sea) across the Guianas.

SMART



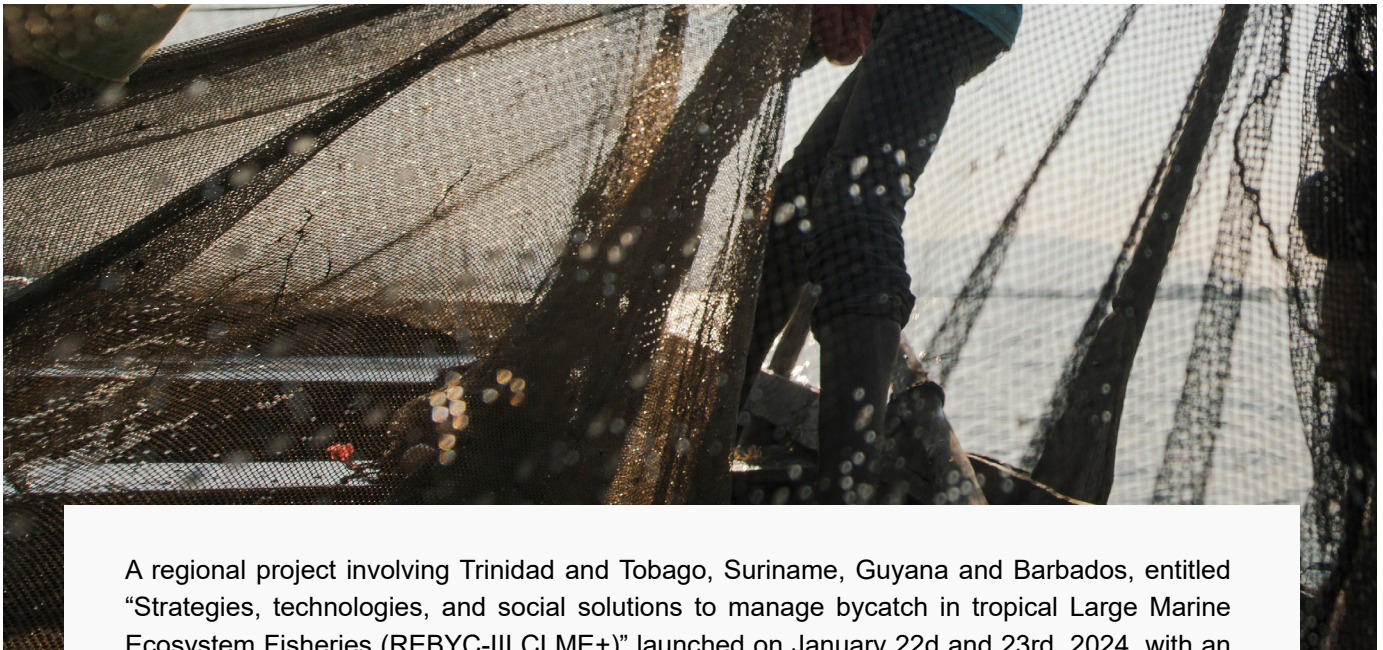
Guyana is now taking the initial steps to advance with SMART through a partnership between FZS and the Protected Areas Commission to examine the applicability of SMART for Guyana's PAs. WWF participated in exchange training facilitated by PAC and FZS, which introduced the SMART Approach and Platform and the development of a roadmap for the rollout of SMART at the national level. WWF's opportunity could be to directly support SMART adoption outside of PAs in Guyana.



## COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

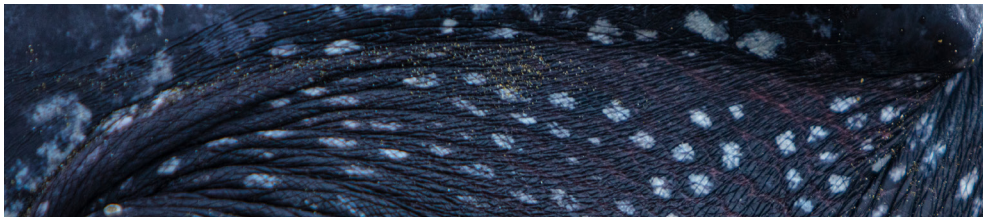
### REAPPOINTMENT OF THE NSTTF TASKFORCE

The National Sea Turtle Task Force (NSTTF) was reappointed on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024. The NSTTF is collaborating with WIDECAS, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), University of Arizona State, and Ecolibrium Inc. on a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) funded project where one (1) of the outcomes is the co-development of leatherback bycatch reduction actions in Trinidad that support fisher livelihoods, which is aligned to the draft priority action for bycatch under the draft revised Sea Turtle Recovery Action Plan (STRAP).



A regional project involving Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, Guyana and Barbados, entitled “Strategies, technologies, and social solutions to manage bycatch in tropical Large Marine Ecosystem Fisheries (REBYC-III CLME+)” launched on January 22d and 23rd, 2024, with an inception workshop with key stakeholders. The project is being executed by the University of the West Indies, Faculty of Food and Agriculture (UWI, FFA), in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) through funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The objective of the project is to manage bycatch and reduce discards in the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems (CLME+), thereby promoting sustainable and responsible fisheries that provide economic opportunities while ensuring the conservation of marine living resources. It also addresses the adverse impacts of fishing gear on marine habitats and biodiversity, including those caused by abandoned, lost and discarded fishing gear (ALDFG) and ghost fishing mortality. The Environmental Management Authority (EMA) is Chair and Co-Chair of the Project Steering Committee.





## FUNDRAISING UPDATES

### DESIGN OF TWO SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PROJECTS IN THE GUIANAS

The French Guiana office of WWF-France is planning to pilot two regional projects in the Guianas (French Guiana, Suriname, Guyana). Project design for the two projects will focus on two main initiatives:

- The French Agency for Development (AFD) project, which seeks to limit IUU fishing and boost blue initiatives in the Guianas;
- The AFD, Expertise France, IUCN and WWF BIODEV2030 initiative that aims to integrate biodiversity into identified economic sectors within the Guianas through cross-sectoral stakeholder involvement.

Farah Mukhida and Louise Soanes, associated with RAP as the consultants who developed the five-year plan, have been selected to design these two Sustainable Fisheries Management projects.

## UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

### WIDECAST ANNUAL MEETING



The Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network (WIDECAST) will convene its annual general meeting (AGM) on 11-12 March 2024 at Hotel Bougainvillea in Heredia, Costa Rica. The meeting aims to share information on national and regional-level sea turtle research, management, and outreach programs, to learn from peer experiences, to facilitate networking and partnerships, and to strengthen science-based conservation programming. The agenda will include national reports, regional issue reviews, working groups, and technical presentations with related discussions. WIDECAST country coordinators, biologists, policymakers and educators from the Wider Caribbean region attend. An update on the RAP will be provided!

### IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR SUGGESTIONS, PLEASE REACH OUT TO ONE OF OUR COUNTRY REPRESENTATIVES

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