

CITES Secretariat Notification to the Parties No. 2002/039 (Great Britain and Northern Ireland on behalf of the Cayman Islands) Application to register a captive breeding facility for Appendix I listed Green Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) on Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands, British West Indies (UK), in accordance with the provisions of Res. Conf. 11.14, Annex 2, paragraph 3.

SSN VIEW: Oppose the Registration of this Facility.

BACKGROUND

The United Kingdom has submitted to the CITES Secretariat an application to register the Cayman Turtle Farm as a captive breeding facility for green sea turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) under the criteria in Resolution Conf. 11.14. The green sea turtle is listed as Endangered by IUCN and all green turtle populations have been included in Appendix I of CITES since 1981. (Caribbean populations have been included in Appendix I since 1977.) The purpose of the registration is to allow the sale of green turtle products to international tourists. Three Parties have already submitted objections to the Secretariat regarding the registration of this breeding facility (Costa Rica, Israel and USA).

OBJECTIONS TO REGISTRATION OF THE FACILITY INCLUDE

- Uncertainty of the legal status of the founding stock. The UK application states "no receipts or permits are presently available to support the legitimacy of these activities."
- The creation of a demand for green sea turtle products could encourage existing illegal trade thus undermining sea turtle conservation efforts throughout the Caribbean region as well as other regions.
- Possible adverse impact on wild populations through the introduction of diseases from the facility's release into the wild of hatchling turtles of mixed lineages hatched at the facility.
- Adverse impact on the gene pool of the wild population caused by the release of hatchlings and the escape of adults due to natural accidents such as hurricanes.
- Uncertainty of the farm's capability of producing F2 generation in a controlled environment as required by Resolution Conf. 10.16.

OTHER INTERNATIONAL TREATIES ON SEA TURTLES

The conservation of endangered species of sea turtles is a major concern of most countries in the Americas. In fact, this widespread recognition of the need to take action to conserve sea turtle populations gave rise to the first and only international treaty whose sole purpose is the protection and conservation of sea turtles, **The Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC)**, which recently entered into force and had its first COP in San Jose, Costa Rica in August 2002.

The **Specially Protected Areas of Wildlife Protocol (SPAW)** of the Cartagena Convention for the Wider Caribbean region recently entered into force. The SPAW protocol protects all species of sea turtles in the region from all kinds of threats including international trade. The UK is a signatory to this protocol and at the first COP in Havana, Cuba in September 2001, the UK delegation said ratification was forthcoming.

These nascent treaties work to protect and conserve all of the species of sea turtles in the region through a series of measures aimed at achieving sound regional conservation and management plans that will guarantee the survival of these species.

Unfortunately, the Parties of these treaties have not had a chance to discuss any of the proposals concerning sea turtles presented to CITES. The registration of this facility would undermine the efforts of the IAC and the SPAW Protocol to achieve regionally accepted conservation measures and management plans for sea turtles.

Under the **Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)**, all six species of marine turtles found in the Western Hemisphere are listed on Appendix I and Appendix II. Many CITES Parties are also Party to the CMS which stipulates that "Range States of a migratory species listed in Appendix I shall endeavour to: a) conserve and, where feasible and appropriate, restore those habitats of the species which are of importance in removing the species from danger of extinction; and b) prevent, remove, compensate for or minimize as appropriate the adverse effects of activities or obstacles that seriously impede or prevent the migration of the species; and c) to

the extent feasible and appropriate, to prevent, reduce or control factors that are endangering or are likely to further endanger the species, including strictly controlling the introduction of, or controlling or eliminating, already introduced exotic species." [CMS Article III (4)].

The Cayman farm operation presents several risks that violate the conservation measures of the CMS, such as the possible introduction of diseases to the wild population and adverse impacts on the Caribbean gene pool through reintroduction of juveniles whose lineage comes from different populations. Also the resumption of international trade in green turtle shells to tourists which has the potential to create a market for green turtle carapaces and stimulate illegal trade which would undermine conservation efforts throughout the region.

Prepared by the Sea Turtle Working Group of the Species Survival Network