



MARINE PROGRAMME:

conserving the world's most productive sea



Model Experience

Helping sea turtles: a change in practices and perceptions

Although our coasts do not harbor nesting beaches, the Peruvian sea is a key habitat for the development of sea turtles, especially during their growth stage, since it provides a generous and varied source of food. This is important, considering that each turtle species seeks different foods, ranging from jellyfish and crustaceans to algae. Unfortunately, despite a ban on turtle capture, incidental capture by artisanal fishing is not uncommon, especially when fishing for mahi-mahi (*Coryphaena hippurus*) and other species with longlines.

WWF Peru works – within the framework of a regional initiative in eight American Pacific countries – alongside hundreds of fishermen from the ports of Pucusana, Paita, Salaverry, Chimbote and Ilo developing local capacities to adopt improved

Bycatch

Sea turtles are among the most charismatic marine animals. However, the respect and protection that they receive is not reflected in the same proportion. Marine pollution, the predation of their eggs, as well as their incidental capture (bycatch) - or intentional capture - depletes their populations in regions such as the Pacific, where, for instance, it is estimated that in less than 30 years the number of female reproducing leatherback turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*) has been reduced from 90 000 to 2300. WWF Peru works directly with the fishermen in some of the most important artisanal ports in Peru, promoting good fishing practices in order to reduce sea turtle bycatch, which represents the largest threat for them within our sea.



fishing practices, such as circle hooks, which reduce the bycatch of turtles and other animals that play a key role in marine ecosystems.

Changes on board

Artisanal fishing is a tough and demanding activity. For this reason, promoting improved practices among fishermen is a complex and long-term task that WWF channels through valuable partners who live day to day with these men of sea, either on the harbor or aboard their boats.

Since 2004, WWF Peru works in some of the most important artisanal ports promoting the experimental replacement of common hooks with circle hooks, which drastically reduce bycatch by making it difficult for the turtles to become hooked

when trying to take the bait. After training the fishermen on this new fishing gear, WWF observers come along during their long journeys in the open sea, where they combine training and monitoring tasks. This has allowed the collection of unprecedented information regarding fishing practices and turtle bycatch in Peru and also has led to the first crafts adopting these improved hooks which allow the reduction of turtle bycatch up to a 90% without significantly affecting targeted fishing.

Conscience and rescue

The circle hooks are only part of the strategy. The team of coordinators and observers – technicians or fishing professionals – has trained around 200 fishermen from 100 crafts, in five Peruvian ports, on the importance of sea turtles and the need for their conservation. To achieve this, they receive training on the use of turtle release gear which facilitates the liberation of hooked turtles, reducing risks of disease and death for the animals. Similarly, dozens of workers from the ports, fishermen spouses and most importantly, students and teachers also receive training on turtles and on the efforts carried out by the fishermen to conserve them, closing a cycle that promotes the conservation of some of the most beloved but threatened marine animals in our seas.



Key facts:

- This program is one of the first in monitoring turtle bycatch in Peru directly aboard the fishing crafts.
- For the first time, fishermen have adopted improved hooks as part of a regional turtle conservation initiative backed by the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), among others.
- Peru houses 5 sea turtle species: the hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), the green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), the olive or pacific ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*), the loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*) and the leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*), the largest and most threatened species within our seas.

We work with: Federación de Integración y Unificación de Pescadores Artesanales del Perú (FIUPAP), Asociación Nacional de Empresas Pesqueras Artesanales del Perú (ANEPAP), Dirección de Pesca Artesanal del Ministerio de la Producción (PRODUCE) and Centro de Entrenamiento Pesquero (CEP) de Paita.

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