

PRESS RELEASE**LONG TERM SOLUTIONS HIGHLIGHTED AT THE HIGH LEVEL MEETING TO MITIGATE TURTLE MORTALITY IN TAMIL NADU**

The state of Tamil Nadu, having an extensive coastline of 1076 Km which is mostly east-facing and a small stretch of about 80 KMs west-faced coast, has historically been visited by Sea Turtles to breed and lay eggs. Every year, the preparation for sea turtle season begins in Tamil Nadu Forest Department by undertaking preparatory works, making temporary hatcheries, organization of orientation programme for the staff and having inter-departmental co-operation meetings starting from the month of December onwards. In order to bolster the efforts of the Department, the Government of Tamil Nadu has already announced setting up of Sea-Turtle Conservation Centers at Chennai and Nagapattinam, which will further give impetus to the conservation efforts towards these species.

This year during Turtle nesting season the department established **52** hatcheries spread over in 8 divisions of 14 coastal districts. In order to elicit interdepartmental cooperation, an awareness workshop was organized in the beginning of the turtle conservation season on 7th January, inaugurated by Hon'ble Minister for Forests and Khadi with the participation of all multiple stakeholders including researchers, NGOs and departments like Forests, Fisheries, Costal Security Group of TN police and Indian Coast Guard.

This year so far a total of **904** nests have already been collected, with **100582** eggs, which have been meticulously translocated to the departmental hatcheries. Monitoring is being carried out 24/7 in all these hatcheries right from the translocation till release of every hatchling. A total of 129 turtle guardians have been deployed for the purpose and nests are monitored with the help of TN Turtle guardians app. As on 10.02.2025, **345** hatchlings have also been released. Last year during entire season 258907 eggs were collected in forest department hatcheries and 215778 hatchlings were released.

This year has seen unusually high mortality of turtles, with carcasses getting washed ashore. As on 12th February 2025, a total of 1111 carcasses have got washed ashore in the Chennai coastline and total 1382 carcasses have been accounted for in the entire coast line of state, including Chennai. The mortality remained high in January and with the concerted efforts of the Government through Forests, Fisheries Tamil Nadu Costal Security Group, Coast Guards and NGOs, the mortality has come down significantly

now and nesting has also picked up. The Government has constituted a task force under the chairmanship of PCCF and CWLW of state to upscale the conservation efforts jointly by Forests, Fisheries, Coastal Security Group of TN Police, Indian Coast Guard and Non-Governmental organizations. Joint patrolling is continuously being done by the departments of forests and Fisheries and CSG and more than 200 violations of prohibitive fisheries practices have been detected and challenged. It has been decided to link continuance of subsidy to conformity with the Fisheries regulation.

The Minister for Forests and Khadi Dr. K. Ponmudy chaired a high level meeting at the Secretariat on 14th February 2025 which was attended by Tmt. Supriya Sahu IAS, ACS, R. Srinivas Reddy PCCF-HoFF, Rakesh Kumar Dogra, Chief Wildlife Warden. Members of the Tamil Nadu State Wildlife Board, Dr Suresh from the Wildlife Institute of India, Dr. Ashraf Wildlife Trust of India and NGO's viz Tree foundation, SSTN, etc participated in the discussions.

It was decided that a long term strategy was required to mitigate Turtle Mortality in the state of Tamil Nadu for which the Wildlife Institute of India would be requested to conduct an extensive telemetry study about Turtle conservation areas through a comprehensive survey and assessment.

This would give an idea about protection measures to be taken where Sea Turtles prefer to congregate during the nesting season. This will also provide invaluable information about Turtle movement and their migratory behaviour.

The high level meeting also decided to undertake long-term fishermen, education and orientation programme on Turtle conservation, making them stakeholders in the programme. A collaborative project would go a long way in sustainable conservation efforts for Sea Turtles. It was also decided in the meeting to strengthen surveillance mechanism jointly by the Forest, Fisheries, Coast Guard and Coastal Security group of the Tamil Nadu Police.

Apart from this, further to strengthen surveillance, the Forest Department would induct specialised boats to be operated jointly for the purpose of patrolling.

The use of Turtle excluder devices (TED) has been mandatory for fishing so as to conserve turtles. It was decided to enforce its use strictly. The local administration including Corporations, Municipalities and Rural local bodies will take steps to keep nesting beaches clean from garbage, unauthorised construction to prevent damage to nests from stray dogs.

The ABC (Animal Birth Control) programme to be especially implemented comprehensively on priority in these areas.

One of the most important steps towards protecting turtles from losing its direction would be to switch-off bright lights from beaches for which Government orders are already in place. Local bodies would take steps to either change the direction of the light away from the beach or switch them off during night hours during the nesting season to prevent disorientation of turtles.

A large group of volunteers are already working in the turtle conservation programme. This could be further expanded and their services could also be utilised towards community surveys.

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