

## Case Study Overview – French Guiana

**Submitted by:** World Wildlife Fund (WWF) France

**Location:** French Guiana

**Collaborators:** Local fisheries committee; Local conservation association; fishers working around major nesting sites

**Threat:** Local fisheries bycatch of olive ridleys (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) during nesting season

**Contributing factors:** Livelihood dependence, food source, distrust of “turtle people” and being demonized, nesting turtles are source of tourism

**Description:** During nesting season, some beaches in French Guiana receive hundreds of nesting olive ridley turtles per night. Those preferred nesting beaches overlap with productive halieutic zones where fishermen focus their efforts on catching redfish and bass using gillnets. Reports have shown that a single gillnet can be responsible for entangling and killing 30 olive ridleys at once during peak nesting season. These interactions are devastating for the turtle population as well as for the fishers who lose equipment and time during each interaction.

The proposed solution to this threat is a voluntary no-fishing zone implemented and governed long-term by the fishers and fisheries committee, which has been introduced and discussed with the fishers over the past 3 years. Many of the fishers are already supportive of this solution, and a **behavior change campaign is needed to start implementation and support long-term adherence despite the no-take zone impacting the livelihoods of the local fishermen.**

### **Background:**

#### **Community/Target Audience**

The zone is home to 100 ship owners that employ hundreds of local people and feed thousands, making fishing a central part of the economy. Fishers are represented by the local fisheries committee, which, over the 20 years that WWF has worked to nurture relationships, has become collaborative and open to discussion with conservationists, especially when technical, practical solutions are proposed.

#### **Stakeholder Relationships**

In addition to fishers, the area is important for tourism. Because the beaches are near town, they are easily accessible and visited by both the locals and turtle enthusiasts from all over the world (mainly French tourists). Despite this, tourism is not considered an important part of the economy and has not been influential enough to make locals value sea turtles and biodiversity.

WWF also works closely with both regional French representatives (public servants placed by the national government) and the local government (locally elected), as well as a local association called Kwata, which focuses on conducting beach surveys and organizing a major volunteer network to raise awareness in the general public.

#### **Previous Work – Successes and Failures**

WWF's long-term presence in the region and many years working with fisheries have successfully changed the attitudes of the fishers from distrusting and uncommunicative to collaborative and open to solutions. For example, an initiative named COAST allowed for interviews to be conducted around the

region to begin discussing bycatch. Fishermen were defensive and unwilling to discuss the topic but allowed WWF to pinpoint the taboo subject of bycatch and the fear that any data on bycaught protected species would be used to demonize fishers. Since then, WWF has spent years collaborating with and earning the trust of local fishermen and communities to the point that the groups now work together closely on multiple projects along French Guiana's coastline.

The fisheries committee and WWF collaborated to launch a Turtle Excluder Device (TED) initiative. They raised funds to purchase the first TED, located a ship owner and his captain that were prepared to test it, and tweaked the gadget to species and fishing circumstances until it was ideally suited to the wild shrimp trawlers. Meetings, seminars, and trials were scheduled, and further funding was sought to expand the program. In 2009, the fishermen themselves asked for an official requirement that all wild shrimp trawlers in French Guiana be outfitted.

This was the first time a conservation NGO and the fishery community in French Guiana collaborated together, leading to the protection of hundreds of turtles per year. Since then, WWF has continuously built a trusting relationship and started several other projects.

The lesson of this project was that one can never expect fishers' adhesion or behavior change unless the entire project is co-built. Consultation is not enough. Cooperation, negotiation and day-to-day co-management is needed.

Challenges include important cultural differences between conservationists and fishers, political inconsistency (fisheries committee members are elected, so the leaders change every 5 years as do their positions within projects/initiatives). There are also economic difficulties because the fishers are reliant on fishing for food and livelihoods and the fisheries committee is underfunded and understaffed.

On olive ridleys, a project first started in late 2019 but the COVID pandemic slowed it down. While the project has progressed, more support is needed to ensure the wide-scale behavior change in the entire territory and its long-time maintenance.