



Media Release

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Regional Turtle Research Database Launched in Vanuatu

HONOLULU (7 June 2006) A new database for consolidating monitoring and research information on threatened and endangered sea turtle species in the Asia-Pacific Region will be launched June 12, 2006 in Vanuatu.

The development of this region-wide research database is a critical step to understanding population trends for Pacific sea turtles. Various institutions throughout the Asia-Pacific and Pacific Islands region have been tagging turtles and collecting a range of data, and although large volumes of information are being generated, there has been little overall coordination of this work.

In response, the Turtle Research Database System (TREDS) was developed through international cooperation by sea turtle and database experts. In 2003, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (WPRFMC or "Council") set up a steering committee comprised of specialists from various Pacific organizations, and began coordinating the rehabilitation of an existing but outdated database. Today TREDS is ready for testing and review, and will be field-tested in Vanuatu where a strong legacy of turtle work already exists.

TREDS is introduced in Vanuatu's marine turtle program based at the Wan Smolbag Theater. This is a community-based program that has been actively tagging turtles and promoting conservation since 1995. "The program has collaborated well with the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP) and has enough data to help assess any database errors and evaluate if it is in fact user-friendly," explains Anne Trevor, SPREP Associate Database Officer. Following Vanuatu, testing and implementation of TREDS will continue in sea turtle programs of Papua New Guinea, New Caledonia, independent Samoa and American Samoa.

The database can store information on tag deployment, nesting beach and foraging ground monitoring data, clutch and hatchling information, and biological samples (such as genetic data). It can systematically inventory tags used per project, help standardize data collection protocols, and generate project-specific and site-specific summary reports.

“We won’t really know how TREDIS operates or if it’s ready for mass distribution throughout the region until we test it under practical field conditions,” says Irene Kinan, Marine Turtle Program Coordinator for the Council. The launch in Vanuatu also fits well with the 2006 Year of the Sea Turtle celebration geared towards raising awareness and local capacity for sea turtle conservation.

TREDIS is a joint initiative by SPREP, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), Queensland Parks Authority, Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC), NOAA Fisheries Pacific Islands Fishery Science Center, Marine Research Foundation of Malaysia, and the Council. The rehabilitation of SPREP’s “old” database into the “new” and improved TREDIS is largely based on 35+ years of expertise and a database developed by Dr. Colin Limpus for sea turtle research in Queensland, Australia.

The overarching database for the Pacific Island region will be housed at SPREP in Samoa, and a second central database will likely be managed by SEAFDEC in Malaysia. Together these agencies will manage and consolidate sea turtle research data for their 31 member countries in the Pacific Ocean. Individual projects will retain ownership and use of their data (within reasonable time periods) for publishing and recognition.

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Websites: www.sprep.org/yost and www.wpcouncil.org/protected