

National Marine Turtle Action Plan

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In news: Recently, the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) has released 'Marine Mega Fauna Stranding Guidelines' and 'National Marine Turtle Action Plan'

Need for these guidelines and action plan

- India has rich marine biodiversity along a vast coastline of over 7,500 km. From colorful fish, sharks, including Whale Sharks, turtles and big mammals like whales, dolphins and dugongs to bright corals
 - marine habitats not only harbor diverse species but also provide resources essential for human wellbeing.
- Millions of people depend on these resources ranging from maritime trade and transport, food, mineral resources, cultural traditions, spiritual values and inspiration that draws tourists from around the world.
- Despite the immense economic, ecological and cultural values of marine habitats in India, marine mega fauna species and marine turtles face a wide variety of challenges including stranding and entanglement.
- Managing such challenging situations requires coordination, action and people's participation which would help in the long-term conservation of marine species and their habitats.

Key features of the documents

The documents launched recently contain ways and means to not only promote inter-sectoral action for conservation but also guide improved coordination amongst the government, civil society and all relevant stakeholders on the response to cases of stranding, entanglement, injury or mortality of marine

mammals and also conservation of marine turtles.

These two documents highlight actions to be taken for handling stranded animals on shore, stranded or entangled animals in the sea or on a boat, management actions for improved coordination, reducing threats to marine species and their habitats, rehabilitation of degraded habitats, enhancing people's participation, advance scientific research and exchange of information on marine mammals and marine turtles and their habitats.

Marine Turtle

- Sea turtles, sometimes called marine turtles, are reptiles of the order Testudines and of the suborder Cryptodira
- The seven existing species of sea turtles are the green sea turtle, loggerhead sea turtle, Kemp's ridley sea turtle, olive ridley sea turtle, hawksbill sea turtle, flatback sea turtle, and leatherback sea turtle
- For each of the seven types of sea turtles, females and males are the same size; there is no sexual dimorphism.
- In general, sea turtles have a more fusiform body plan than their terrestrial or freshwater counterparts.
- Threats: Over the last 200 years, human activities have tipped the scales against the survival of these ancient mariners. Slaughtered for their eggs, meat, skin, and shells, sea turtles suffer from poaching and over-exploitation. They also face habitat destruction and accidental capture known as bycatch in fishing gear. Climate change has an impact on turtle nesting sites; it alters sand temperatures, which then affects the sex of hatchlings

Conservation status: All 7 species of marine turtles are listed on Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). 3 are classified as critically endangered by IUCN and a further 3

are classified as endangered.