

Galápagos & Eastern Pacific Newsletter



December 2010



Letter from the Field



Dear Friends of the Galápagos:

Galápagos lies in the Eastern Pacific Ocean (EPO), and shares in the EPO's troubles. WWF understands the human-caused problems that affect the EPO, and our Smart Fishing Initiative (SFI) is one of the solutions we've come up with. It's crucial, because the EPO's rich biodiversity

is being threatened, and it deserves to be protected.

The EPO is that part of the Pacific Ocean east of Hawaii, south of the United States, and adjacent to the west coast waters of countries from Mexico to Chile. Upwellings associated with the California and Humboldt currents, and a diversity of ocean features (underwater volcanoes, ridges and domes), result in high levels of productivity in Eastern Pacific waters. The area supports important fisheries, including tuna, anchovy and mackerel.

Fishing is the primary human activity affecting the EPO, and there is growing evidence that many fisheries are overexploited by both domestic and distant-water fleets. The impacts of unsustainable fishing go beyond the overfishing of target species, threatening oceans with a loss of biodiversity as well as ecosystem goods and services. Fisheries bycatch—that part of the catch that is unused—has recently been estimated to make up 40 percent of total ocean catch—at least 38 million tons of fish annually. Bycatch seriously affects whales, sea turtles, sharks, seabirds and other species.

The most valuable fishery in the Eastern Pacific is the tuna fishery. Approximately 14 percent of world tuna production comes from the EPO, with catches averaging 630,000 tons per year over the last several years. Fleets from countries along the Eastern Pacific Rim compete with fleets from around the world to harvest tuna in the region, and catches are sold to markets worldwide.

In the face of so much pressure on EPO biodiversity—and a complex mix of politics, profits, and livelihoods—WWF has created a framework for strategic investments called the Smart Fishing Initiative (SFI). The strategy focuses our work on fisheries governance and market reform issues in targeted fisheries—including tuna. SFI supports participating country programs in areas ranging from rights-based management, to ecosystem impacts, to the reduction of illegal fishing. This SFI strategy offers great potential to improve the management of our oceans.

Lauren Spurrier
Managing Director

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1 Galápagos Off List of World Heritage Sites in Danger

Eliécer Cruz, M.Sc., Ecoregional Director, WWF Galápagos Program

In July 2010, UNESCO's World Heritage Committee recognized significant progress in Ecuador's efforts to conserve the Galápagos and removed the islands from the list of World Heritage Sites in Danger. WWF and other NGOs and national and local stakeholders have been working together to help the government to protect the islands since Galápagos was placed on the list.

It was on April 10, 2007, that the Ecuadorian president issued an emergency decree declaring the Galápagos ecosystem at risk and making the islands a national priority. To address the problem, he outlined an agenda which included developing a new tourism model for the islands and addressing the threat of the increasing human population. The decree was echoed by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee decision in June 2007, which placed the Galápagos Islands on the Endangered World Heritage Site list—a decision that was supported by WWF.

The UNESCO decision was taken due to threats related to (1) inadequate implementation of the Special Law and lack of patrol and surveillance, (2) inadequate and ineffective quarantine measures to avoid further introduction of nonnative species, (3) illegal fishing activities, (4) increasing human migration, and (5) development of unsustainable tourism.



Since then, the Ecuadorian government has submitted yearly reports to the World Heritage Committee, describing progress made toward the conservation of Galápagos. Prior to the 34th meeting of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in July 2010, a Technical Monitoring Mission was sent to visit the islands. From April 29 to May 4, they assessed the current situation. They noted the progress made by the Ecuadorian government to address the threats posed to Galápagos; they also expressed concern about the introduction of more nonnative species and claims related to sports fishing, which is illegal in the Galápagos Marine Reserve. Based on the mission's report, the World Heritage Committee decided to withdraw the Galápagos Islands from the list of World Heritage Sites in Danger.

Nevertheless, there are still unresolved problems to be tackled in Galápagos, among them unchecked urban development, the growth of the tourism industry, institutional weakness (despite the creation of the new Government Council of Galápagos), and lack of educational reform.

WWF viewed the withdrawal of Galápagos from the Sites in Danger list as recognition from the international community of the government's efforts to conserve the islands—and as a momentum-builder for all stakeholders to continue working together toward a shared vision for the islands. That vision includes sustainable development that benefits the local population, as well as a balanced and safe environment for the unique flora and fauna of Galápagos.

First steps to define such a vision were taken in a four-day workshop onboard the National Geographic vessel *Endeavour*. Over 100 national leaders, experts and representatives of local and international organizations attended the November event. Topics related to bio-security, marine reserves, ecotourism, governance, territorial planning, education, and energy were discussed in order to build a participatory strategic plan and define a shared vision for the Galápagos Islands for the year 2030. The event was organized by the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Environment and Cultural and Human Heritage, and the Galápagos Government Council, jointly with the Galápagos National Park Service, the Charles Darwin Foundation, WWF, Conservation International, the Hemsley Trust Foundation and Lindbland Expeditions.

2 Summit Moves Galápagos Toward Sustainable Tourism

Juan Carlos García, Program Officer, Sustainable Management, WWF Galápagos Program

Stakeholders determined to bring more sustainability to Galápagos tourism met at the First Sustainable Tourism Summit Galápagos 2010, held in Puerto Baquerizo Moreno on September 22-24. There, over 100 representatives of public and private institutions worked together to build consensus on a new tourism model centered on ecotourism.

To engage the local community and stakeholders in this discussion, WWF joined with the Ecuadorian Ministries of Tourism, Environment, and Cultural and Human Heritage, the Government Council of Galápagos, and the Galápagos National Park Service.

The summit was the result of a process that started two years ago, when key authorities and stakeholders proposed a fundamental change in how tourism is managed after UNESCO placed the Galápagos Islands on the Endangered World Heritage Site list. The aim was to convert the important economic activity of tourism into an instrument for environmental conservation and social development. WWF became part of a group of organizations that made substantial efforts to identify problems and suggest strategies for this change. These efforts produced a joint proposal that served as groundwork for the summit.

The meeting resulted in notable successes. For the first time ever, local institutions were able to acknowledge and agree on the main obstacles, as well as on the changes needed to guarantee conservation and sustainable development. The group discussions generated common goals in four prioritized areas: governance, product reengineering, marketing, and tourism monitoring. Participants established responsibilities for all institutions present.

Other summit accomplishments included the decision that the Galápagos Government Council would play a lead role in passing public policies to guarantee implementation of the new tourism model. Participants agreed that tourism products and services must be redesigned based on ecotourism principles and the need to maximize economic benefit to local people. And consensus was reached on the need for a tourism database that enables appropriate authorities to monitor tourism activities and check compliance with ecotourism policies.

The new tourism model will promote the conservation of the islands and greater socioeconomic benefits for the local population while ensuring tourist satisfaction. At the end of the summit, over 70 participants signed the Declaration of Sustainable Tourism for Galápagos, reinforcing their commitment to build a sustainable tourism industry while conserving the islands for the future.



3 Changes in Waste Management Reduce Threats on Santa Cruz

Ulf Hardter, Ph.D., Program Officer, Energy & Waste Management, WWF Galápagos Program

One of the most critical threats to the Galápagos Islands has emerged almost unnoticed over the last two decades: increased generation of waste and improper waste management. These threats are directly related to an increasing number of inhabitants and tourists, and to new consumption patterns and lifestyles.

Waste issues affect not only the land on inhabited islands, but the water throughout the islands. Litter and poorly managed waste easily become marine debris, affecting the fragile marine ecosystem and even the coasts of uninhabited islands. An unknown number of animals are killed every year when they become entangled in pieces of string or plastic bags, or consume floating trash.

More than 500 tons of everyday-use products are shipped to the islands each month. In the end, these products and their packaging create waste. Shipping waste back to the mainland is not currently an option due to high costs and the lack of appropriate infrastructure. In Ecuador, each municipality is responsible for the collection and disposal of waste that is produced in its jurisdiction—and, for lack of a better system, this has resulted in litter on the streets and uncontrolled burning of waste in open-sky dumps.



More than 60 percent of the overall household waste in Galápagos is generated on Santa Cruz Island, which is inhabited by 60 percent of the Galápagos' population and is the center of tourism infrastructure in the archipelago. Since 2006, WWF and Toyota have cooperated with the Municipality of Santa Cruz to implement an efficient waste management and recycling system.



Under this system, households, hotels and businesses separate their waste into three categories: recyclables, organics and non-recyclables. The system includes separate waste collection and advanced recycling and composting processes. We have developed environmentally safe disposal and treatment options. The efficiency of the municipal street cleaning service on Santa Cruz has been improved significantly. And tourism ships have been integrated into the system, so that waste is separated onboard before it is delivered to the island's waste and recycling facilities. Capacity building and outreach have been key components of our work.

Based on the experience acquired on Santa Cruz Island, WWF and Toyota produced a Waste Management Blueprint for the Galápagos Islands in March 2010. The blueprint provides general guidelines to achieving an integrated waste management and recycling system on all inhabited islands of Galápagos, and WWF is seeking additional donors and partners to support this initiative.

To move forward with this idea, we have started cooperating with the Municipality of Isabela to replicate the Santa Cruz initiative. By early 2011, with funds from the Galápagos Conservation Trust and the Albemarle Hotel, we will assign an environmental expert to work with Isabela's municipal administration on this process.

The Santa Cruz project's achievements have been recognized internationally: In June, the project won the Energy Globe Award 2010 in the category of National Winner, competing with more than 800 projects from 105 nations.

4 Sustainable Management Plan in the Works for Mahi-Mahi

Pablo Guerrero, M.Sc., Marine Coordinator, WWF Galápagos Program

The mahi-mahi fishery accounts for 65 percent of landings by the Ecuadorian artisanal fishing fleet and is the most important fishery from an economic point of view because mahi-mahi is exported mainly to the United States. According to the Association of White Fish Exporters of Ecuador (ASOEXPEBLA, in Spanish), the country exported 6,091 tons of mahi-mahi, worth \$37.5 million, to the U.S. in 2008. The following year, 3,875 tons, valued at \$27.2 million, were exported.

The WWF-US Fisheries team and the WWF-Galápagos Program have been working together on a Fishery Improvement Project (FIP) that will better the management of the mahi-mahi fishery. With our partners, we are working on three key issues related to making the fishery more sustainable: (1) improving knowledge of the condition of the stock, (2) finding solutions to bycatch in the fishery, and (3) developing a management plan for the fishery.



The development of a National Plan of Action for the conservation and management of mahi-mahi in Ecuador has been identified as a key aspect of moving the fishery toward certification by the Marine Stewardship Council. Initial steps to prepare this plan were taken in August and September of this year during national workshops held in Salinas and Muisne on the mainland.



Both workshops were organized jointly by WWF, the Ecuadorian Undersecretariat of Fisheries, ASOEXPEBLA, and the National Federation of Fishing Cooperatives of Ecuador (FENACOPEC, in Spanish). More than 70 people—including fishermen, scientists, government authorities, exporters and traders—attended each workshop. We envision having the plan fully developed and adopted by the Ecuadorian government in 2011.

5 Eastern Pacific News: Reduction of Turtle Bycatch Progresses

Moises Mug, Program Leader, Sustainable Fisheries, LAC Secretariat

In September 2010, the WWF Bycatch Program in the Eastern Pacific successfully concluded an 18-month grant period with the Walton Family Foundation, during which we worked to reduce bycatch of marine turtles by changing fishing technologies and practices in artisanal longline fisheries in Ecuador, Colombia and Costa Rica.

The need for this kind of effort is deep. Marine turtle populations in the Eastern Pacific Ocean are in peril, with leatherback and loggerhead turtles in serious danger of extinction. The bycatch of marine turtles in longline fishing operations that are targeting tuna and other commercial species is a major source of mortality for these marine reptiles—especially where fishermen use destructive fishing gear such as J hooks and lack the knowledge and equipment to properly manipulate and release injured turtles.

Studies have found that circle hooks (used instead of traditional J hooks) can reduce the bycatch of marine turtles by up to 90 percent. For the last six years, WWF, in association with partners such as the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, has been working with artisanal longline fishers, with seafood companies, and with governments from Mexico to Peru, to transform the surface longline fishery via the use of circle hooks and other best practices.

In the case of our work under the Walton Family Foundation grant, bycatch teams in Ecuador, Colombia and Costa Rica transformed 143 longline fishing vessels to the use of circle hooks, and trained 852 captains and crew members on proper techniques for handling and releasing turtles caught as bycatch.

In the larger six-year effort, the WWF Bycatch Program in the Eastern Pacific Ocean has transformed more than 500 longline vessels to the use of circle hooks. These vessels now fish in a way that demonstrates that they can reduce turtle bycatch and still fish profitably.



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