



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



General Fisheries Commission  
for the Mediterranean  
Commission générale des pêches  
pour la Méditerranée



# GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE FOR THE HANDLING OF SEA TURTLES CAUGHT INCIDENTALLY IN MEDITERRANEAN FISHERIES

In collaboration with



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# TECHNICAL SHEET N° 1 - IDENTIFICATION OF MEDITERRANEAN SEA TURTLE SPECIES

## Identification key 1

General observation of the sea turtle: scales (present or not present)

## Identification key 2

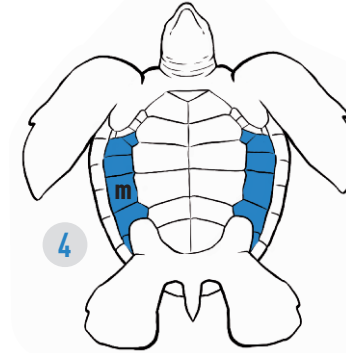
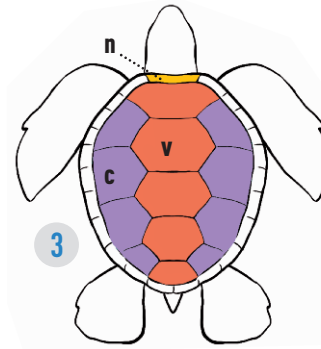
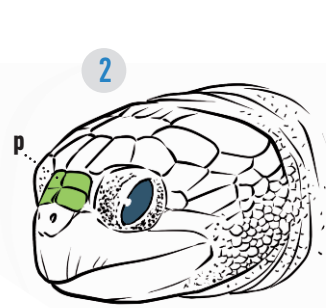
Observation of the head: number of prefrontal scales

## Identification key 3

Observation of the carapace: number of scutes on the carapace and location of the nuchal scute

## Identification key 4

Observation of the plastron: number of marginal scutes



Prefrontal scales (p)

Nuchal scute (n)

Costal scutes (c)

Vertebral scutes (v)

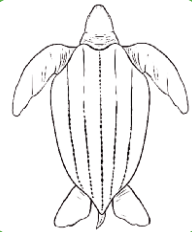
Marginal scutes (m)

Turtle with scales plates

**Leatherback sea turtle**  
(*Dermochelys coriacea*)



Beak with 2 cusps

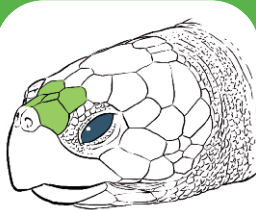


Leather-like carapace with 5 longitudinal ridges

1

Turtle free of scale plates

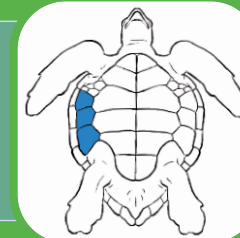
**Loggerhead sea turtle**  
(*Caretta caretta*)



Head with 2 pairs of prefrontal scales

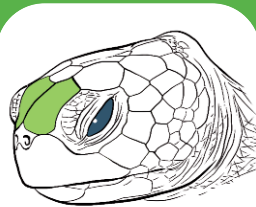


Carapace comprising 5 pairs of costal scutes with the 1<sup>st</sup> pair touching the nuchal scute



Plastron comprising 3 pairs of marginal scutes

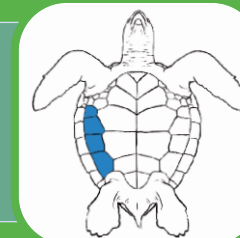
**Green sea turtle**  
(*Chelonia mydas*)



Head with a single pair of prefrontal scales

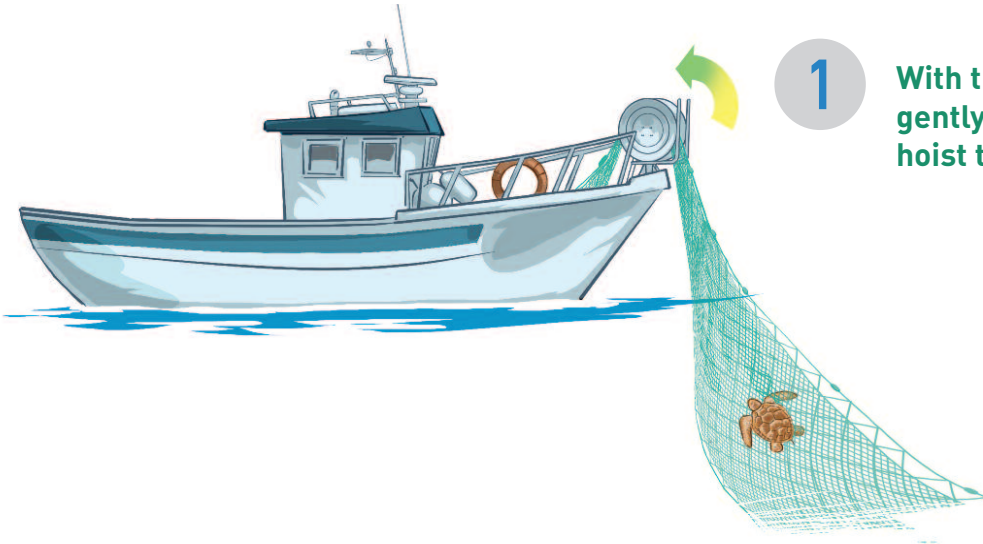


Carapace comprising 4 pairs of costal scutes with no contact between 1<sup>st</sup> pair and the nuchal scute



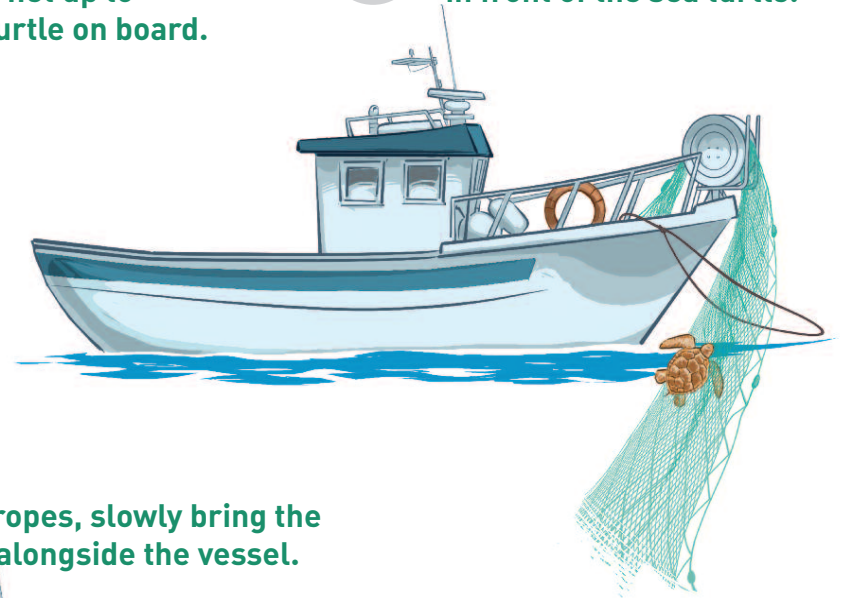
Plastron comprising 4 pairs of marginal scutes

## TECHNICAL SHEET N° 2 - RELEASING SEA TURTLES CAUGHT INCIDENTALLY IN SET NET FISHERIES



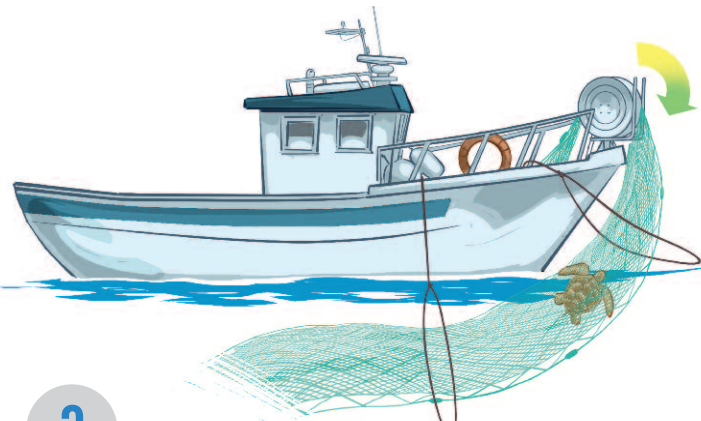
1

With the engine in neutral, gently pull the net up to hoist the sea turtle on board.



2

Pass a rope around the net, in front of the sea turtle.



3

Pass a second rope around the net, behind the sea turtle. Leave some slack in the net.



4

Using the ropes, slowly bring the sea turtle alongside the vessel.

5

Slowly lift the sea turtle on board. Free it from the net using a knife or wire cutters and follow the guidelines in Technical Sheet 5.

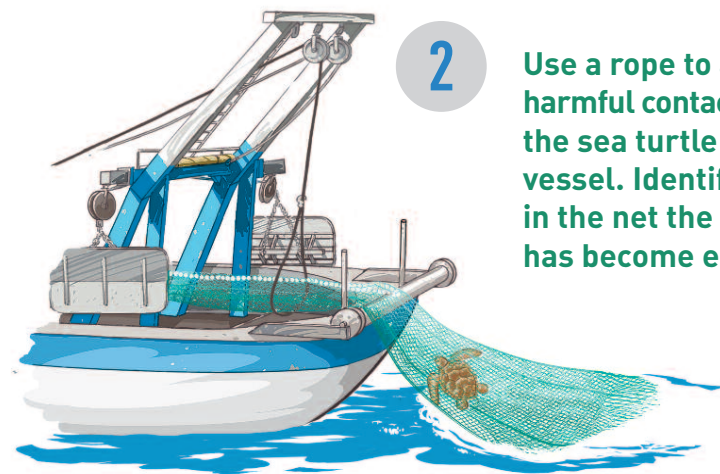


# TECHNICAL SHEET N° 3 - RELEASING SEA TURTLES CAUGHT INCIDENTALLY IN TRAWL FISHERIES



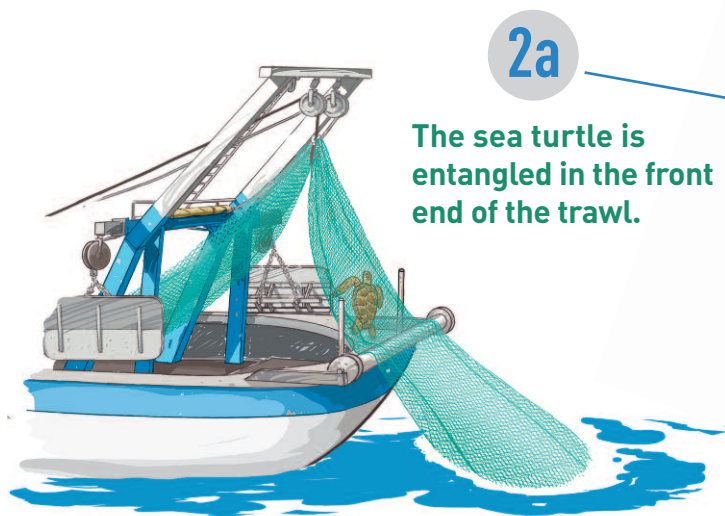
1

With the engine in neutral,  
gently haul in the trawl net.



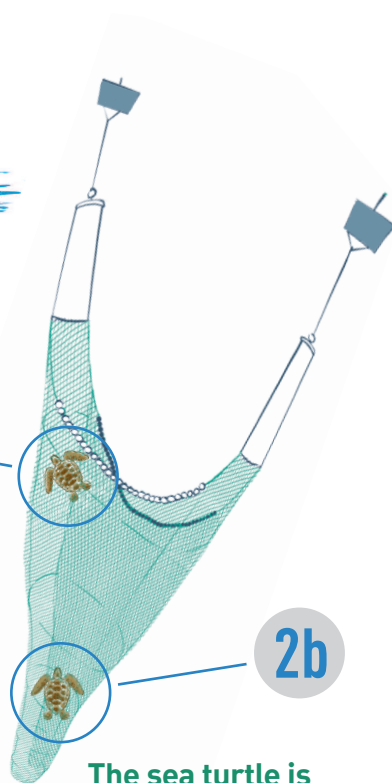
2

Use a rope to avoid any  
harmful contact between  
the sea turtle and the  
vessel. Identify where  
in the net the sea turtle  
has become entangled.



2a

The sea turtle is  
entangled in the front  
end of the trawl.



2b

The sea turtle is  
entangled in the cod  
end of the trawl.



3

Hoist the sea turtle,  
slowly bring it on board.  
Free the sea turtle from  
the net using a knife or  
wire cutters and follow  
the guidelines  
in Technical  
Sheet 5.



# TECHNICAL SHEET N° 4 - RELEASING SEA TURTLES CAUGHT INCIDENTALLY IN LONGLINE FISHERIES

With the engine in neutral, lift the sea turtle on board.

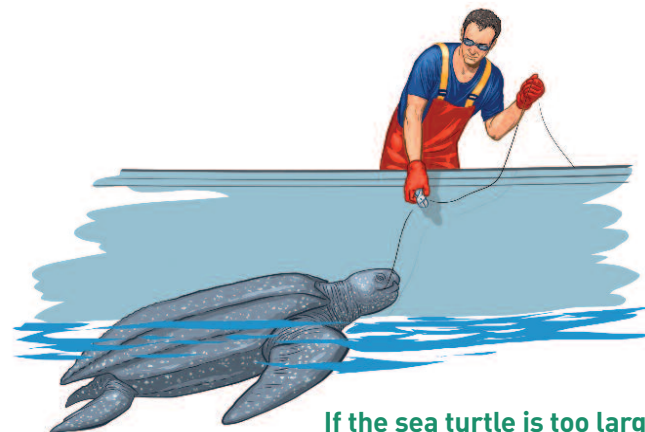


1

If the sea turtle is small, lift it on board using both hands.



If the sea turtle is large, lift it on board with the help of a net and a rope.



If the sea turtle is too large to be lifted on board, bring it as close as possible to the vessel without pulling the line to avoid any injury.

Cut the line as close as possible to the sea turtle with a cutting tool (wire cutters or with a blade attached to a long stick for large longliners)

2

## Removing the hook



If the hook is visible and can be removed

Place a piece of wood or pipe in the sea turtle's mouth to avoid being bitten when removing the hook. Use the wire cutters to cut the hook into two and remove both parts.



If hook removal is not possible

Cut the line as close as possible to the mouth of the sea turtle. **Do not pull the line.**

Do not:



Pull the line



Grab the sea turtle by its flippers

# TECHNICAL SHEET N° 5 - ASSESSING THE SEA TURTLE'S CONDITION

## TESTING THE REACTIVITY OF THE SEA TURTLE

Lift the sea turtle up, holding the edges of the carapace



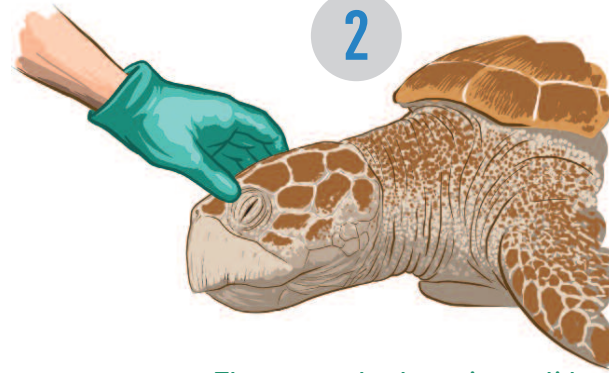
1



The sea turtle moves: the sea turtle is alive. Follow the guidelines in Technical Sheet 6.

The sea turtle does not move: the sea turtle is either dead, or unconscious. Follow steps 2 and 3.

Slowly move your fingers towards the sea turtle's eyes

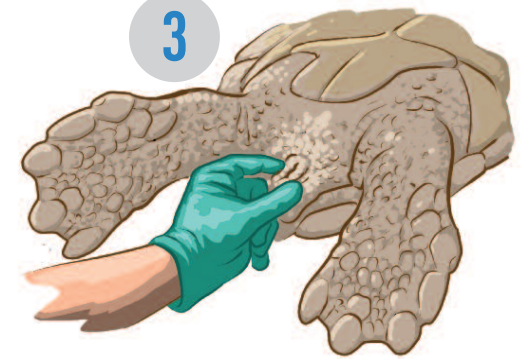


2

The sea turtle closes its eyelids.

The sea turtle is not dead; it could be unconscious with water in its lungs. Start reviving.

Pinch the cloaca



3

The sea turtle contracts the cloaca.

## REVIVING THE SEA TURTLE



Put the sea turtle in the shade, in a safe place and place a wet cloth over its carapace, taking care not to cover its head.

If possible, raise the rear of the sea turtle about 20 cm (using a box or a tire, for example) to help drain the water from its lungs.

Keep it under observation in order to detect any sign of life. Follow the guidelines in Technical Sheet 6.

# TECHNICAL SHEET N° 6 - REPORTING INCIDENTAL CATCHES

## CONTACT THE NATIONAL AUTHORITIES



Contact the relevant national authorities to report each incidental sea turtle catch.

Describe the sea turtle's condition, especially whether it is alive and in good shape, or is injured, or shows no sign of life/is dead.

Organise with the authorities any follow-up care that will be necessary on return to port.

## FOR THE CATCH OF ANY SEA TURTLES, RECORD THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IN THE LOGBOOK:



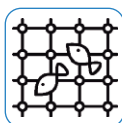
*Date*



*GPS Position*



*Geographical subregion*



*Type of vessel (Fleet segment)*

*Fishing gear*

*Species caught*

*Total number of specimens caught*

*Number of specimens released alive*

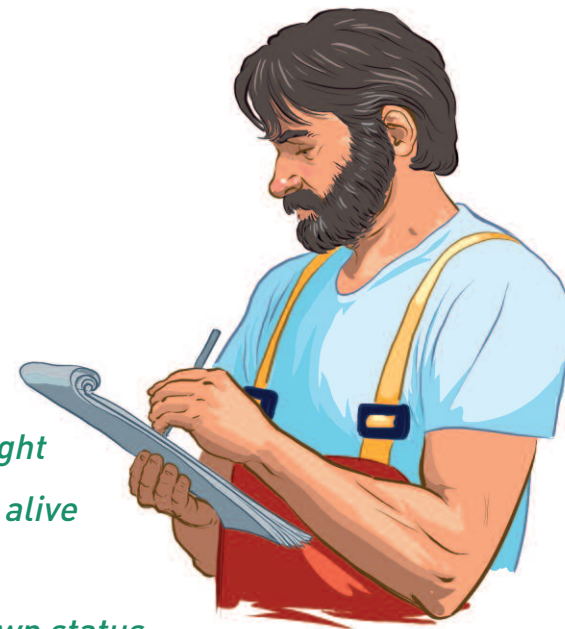
*Number of dead specimens*

*Number of specimens in unknown status*



And if possible...

*Take photos of the sea turtle(s), head and carapace*



The information above is extremely important! Please submit it, as soon as possible, to the relevant national authorities. If in doubt, ask for their help.

# GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE FOR THE HANDLING OF SEA TURTLES CAUGHT INCIDENTALLY IN MEDITERRANEAN FISHERIES

This guide was developed within the framework of a project which aimed to mitigate the negative interactions between endangered marine species and fishing activities. This project was implemented by the Secretariat of the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS) and by the Secretariat of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), in collaboration with the Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC). The main objective of the project was to enhance the conservation of endangered marine species (cetaceans, sea turtles and seabirds, etc.) by promoting responsible fishing practices in the Mediterranean.

## Technical and scientific contribution (in alphabetical order)

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## Main bibliographic references

Claro F., Poisson F., Sacchi J. Guides pratiques pour la libération des tortues marines capturées lors des activités de pêches dans la mer Méditerranée.

Claro F., Poisson F., Sacchi J., Germain E. Aquarium La Rochelle. Guides pratiques pour la libération des tortues marines capturées lors des activités de pêches pour la façade Manche-Atlantique.

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GFCM, 2017. GFCM Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF). Version: 2017.1

UNEP/MAP -RAC/SPA, 2001. Sea Turtle Handling Guidebook for Fishermen–Teaching Book. By Gerosa G. & Aureggi M.

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