



CAFTA-DR Secretariat for Environmental Matters Public Participation in the implementation of Environmental Legislation

Fighting for the future of sea turtles in the Dominican Republic

Case Summary

In May of 2007, Humane Society International (HSI) issued an alert on the danger faced by sea turtles in the Dominican Republic. HSI stated that all species of sea turtles were being illegally hunted and that products produced from the shells of hawksbill turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), which like other species of sea turtles are in serious danger of extinction, were being sold on the street, crafts stores, markets and jewelry stores as jewelry, combs and other decorative articles.

In 2006, the Wildlife Trade Monitoring Network (TRAFFIC) found more than 50,000 products that were made illegally from hawksbill turtles and for sale in different areas of the Dominican Republic. Observing a potential failure to comply with environmental legislation, HSI decided to present a Submission to the CAFTA-DR Secretariat for Environmental Matters.

The Secretariat considered that the issue would benefit of additional information and therefore recommended the preparation of a factual record. While the factual record was being prepared, the Dominican Government enacted strict control measures to fight the problem. In 2009, the WWF and TRAFFIC reported a 99% reduction in Hawksbill turtle products at sites that they had previously visited. To date (2017), the government continues fighting to protect sea turtles as, even though the trade in hawksbill turtle products has almost been eradicated, the turtles still face serious threats.

Challenges faced

The problem of hunting sea turtles in the Dominican Republic was made clear by the thousands of sea turtle products being sold. Article 140 of Law 64-00 prohibits fishing, capturing, killing, selling, producing manufactured or craft goods, exhibiting or possessing species or parts of species in danger of extinction. In addition, Decree 752-01 established a 10-year prohibition to protect all species of sea turtles. However, the legal protection of sea turtles faced the following challenges:

1. The hunting and use of sea turtles.
2. Sea turtles are on the CITES red list due to the high risk of extinction.
3. The market for sea turtle products was enormous. In 2006, TRAFFIC documented their findings in the Dominican Republic of some 50,000 pieces made from sea turtles and being sold openly to the public. The same report stated that demand for these products was growing.
4. Due to the behavior of their species, Caribbean sea turtles don't only belong to the Dominican Republic but to the Caribbean as a whole. This problem was affecting the species throughout the region.



Energetic actions

“Within the Ministry we had to develop a new system to respond to citizens and we saw the need to take radical measures to resolve the problem being denounced.”

Rosa Otero

Ministry of Environment and
Natural Resources of the
Dominican Republic
Av. Cayetano Germosen, Santo
Domingo, Dominican
Republic.
+1 809-567-4300.
www.ambiente.gob.do

Actions taken

The Submitter, HSI, followed-up on the state of the inventory of sea turtle products that was required by law. As a result, the government confiscated and prohibited the sale of all sea turtle products.

The Ministry of Environment of the Dominican Republic, in response to the Submission, took a series of forceful actions to stop the sale of sea turtle products and eliminate this source of pressure on the species. Among the measures that were taken include:

Strategic Actions

1. The presentation of a Submission with the CAFTA-DR Secretariat for Environmental Matters.
2. Dialogue in an uncertain environment as the Secretariat did not have any cooperation and participation experience with this type of process. This strategy resulted in the submission mechanism being seen as an opportunity for citizens to participate in creating solutions to environmental problems.
3. The decision of the Ministry to seek a solution to the root problem of selling sea turtle products to tourists.

1. The total prohibition of possessing, selling or transporting sea turtle products.
2. A wide-spread campaign to confiscate and destroy sea turtle products throughout the country, especially in tourist centers.
3. An informational and public awareness campaign on the importance of protecting sea turtles.

Studies carried out after these actions were taken prove the significant impact they had given that the selling sea turtle products on the streets of the Dominican Republic has been drastically reduced.

Results achieved

Achievements for this case include:

1. A 99% reduction in the presence of sea turtle products in the country's streets and tourism centers (more than 50,000 pieces had originally been reported)
2. The Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources demonstrated leadership in the enforcement of environmental laws and went above and beyond the request made by the Submitter.
3. The design of new, informal mechanisms to facilitate communication between the Submitters and environmental authorities.
4. As this was the first case handled within the framework of Chapter 17's Environmental Submission Mechanism, it helped to establish precedents for all stages of the process including the preparation of factual records.

Contact Us

Secretariat for Environmental Matters
4a Av. 10-25, Zona 14
Guatemala, Guatemala
Postal Code: 01014
+502 2368-2151
info@saa-sem.org
www.saa-sem.org



Visit our website for more information
www.saa-sem.org

The Secretariat for Environmental Matters (SEM) is an international organization that was created within the framework of the Free Trade Agreement between the Dominican Republic, Central America and the United States of America (CAFTA-DR). The mission of the SEM is to administrate the CAFTA-DR Environmental Submissions Mechanism in accordance with CAFTA-DR articles 17.7 and 17.8.