



University of Hawaii at Manoa

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RL:0517

SR 85 and SCR 77
REQUESTING ALLOWANCE OF THE TAKING OF GREEN SEA TURTLES
AROUND THE HAWAIIAN ISLANDS FOR DAILY SUBSISTENCE PURPOSES ONLY

Statement for
Senate Committee on
Economic Development
Public Hearing - 5 April 1984

By
Doak C. Cox, Environmental Center
Jacquelin Miller, Environmental Center

SR 85 and SCR 77 would request the Hawaii Congressional delegation to request the National Marine Fisheries and the Fish and Wildlife Service's allowance of the taking of Green Sea Turtles around the Hawaiian Islands for daily subsistence purposes. This statement on the resolutions does not represent an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

In April 1983, the Department of Commerce, National Marine Fisheries Service conducted a review of the regulations concerning the taking of sea turtles for subsistence purposes by residents of Guam and Hawaii. This review included seven public meetings held statewide for public input on the issue. Notices of the review were sent to interested agencies and public announcement of the meetings and 60 day review period were provided in the Federal Register, vol. 48, no. 77 on April 20, 1983. The Environmental Center coordinated a broad review of the issue at that time and presented our comments at the public hearing held on May 18, 1983 in Honolulu.

Because the concerns and conclusions expressed in our May 18, 1983 review remain valid, and are pertinent to the resolutions now being considered we attach to this statement a copy of the review.

We should call to your attention several significant errors of fact in SR 85 and SCR 77. Several of the whereas clauses refer to the absence of "comprehensive studies" in the initial designation of the threatened status of the turtles (whereas #9), a lack of "documentation" proving a need to protect the turtles (whereas #11), and lacks of any studies on the Green Sea Turtle population around the Hawaiian islands and plans for future studies (whereas's #12, #14).

Extensive research on the Hawaiian Green Sea Turtle began in 1973 under funding provided by the University of Hawaii, Sea Grant and the Hawaii State Legislature. The research included 6 years of monitoring of the breeding population at French Frigate Shoals, and investigations including tagging, feeding, breeding, growth rate measurements and population characteristic studies of turtles in and around the main islands of Hawaii. The decision to classify the Green Sea Turtle as a "threatened" species was reached by the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1978 on the basis of 4½ years of extensive study with opportunity for public input, reviews, and public comment.

The National Marine Fisheries Service has continued research on the Green Sea Turtle up to the present with assistance and support from Sea Grant and the University of Hawaii including students and faculty from the Hilo campus. The results of the ongoing research support the conclusions and recommendations reached in the early studies which led to the threatened species status in 1978. Publications documenting these studies are on file at the National Marine Fisheries Service, Honolulu Laboratory and at the University of Hawaii.

Attachment



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June 9, 1983
RR:0070

Mr. Eugene T. Nitta
Western Pacific Program Office
National Marine Fisheries Service
P.O. Box 3830
2570 Dole Street
Honolulu, Hawaii 96812

Dear Mr. Nitta:

Review of Regulations
Concerning the Taking of Sea Turtles
For Subsistence Purpose

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the above cited regulations. Our preliminary comments were presented at the Public Hearing in Honolulu, Hawaii, May 18, 1983 by Sheila Conant. The Environmental Center review has been prepared with the assistance of Sheila Conant, General Science; Edward Stroup, Tom Clarke and Keith Chave, Oceanography; Albert Banner and Phillip Helfrich, Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology; Kirk Smith, East West Center; Ted Pettit, Physiology; and Lee Hannah, Mark Ingolia and Jacquelin Miller, Environmental Center.

Sea turtles, which are presently endangered or threatened, are in need of the fullest possible protection. The full range of factors responsible for the decline in Sea Turtle populations is not completely understood, yet it is estimated that harvesting and destruction of nesting sites has caused up to 90% of the current decline in Sea Turtle populations. All pressures which can be reasonably removed should be, until these species are no longer endangered. Subsistence allotments are difficult to limit and difficult to rescind should they be found to be detrimental. Such regulations are also particularly subject to abuse. Modern technology permits taking and capturing turtles in far greater numbers and more frequently than under native "subsistence" fishing conditions. For these reasons, and because no traditional culture in Hawaii or Guam seems dependent on the taking of sea turtles, we would find revision of Special Rule 50-CFR-227-D inadvisable.

With proper management now, the sea turtle population may be expected to rebound sufficiently to withstand "subsistence" taking in the future. Without adequate safeguards now, sea turtles may well be lost to all cultures forever. Even at present, it is difficult to enforce existing restrictions. Expansion of the subsistence taking rule would seem worthy of consideration if current restrictions threatened the existence of true traditional cultures, but this is not the case. Expanding permissible taking under the present circumstances risks possible permanent loss of a resource in exchange for the temporary pleasure of a few. This is an unwise bargain. Perhaps in the interest of equity, subsistence taking should be banned in all areas, but expanding subsistence taking seems clearly unreasonable.

June 9, 1983

The potential consuming populations in Hawaii and Guam are too large to assume that these markets could be breached without very serious detriment to sea turtle populations. Consistency with the letter and intent of the Endangered Species Act would seem to preclude this option. We would suggest that the prudent action for the present is no less than maintenance of the current stringency of subsistence taking rules.

Yours truly,

Doak C. Cox
Director

cc: OEQC Tom Clarke
 Sheila Conant Phil Helfrich
 Edward Stroup Keith Chave
 Albert Banner Lee Hannah
 Kirk Smith Mark Ingoglia
 Ted Pettit Jacquelin Miller