

# Species: Leatherback Turtle

OSPAR Recommendation 2013/06:

Contracting Parties are required to report progress with implementation of recommendations every six years, with initial more frequent reporting until 2019.

Measures taken by Contracting Parties to protect the Leatherback Turtle including national legislation, action to reduce marine litter, especially plastic bags, and designation of MPAs



## Description

The leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) is the only marine turtle considered a regular and normal member of North American and European Atlantic waters, and hence the OSPAR Maritime Area is within the natural foraging range of this species. Today, the largest populations are in the Atlantic and Caribbean. The major breeding grounds for this species are in the western Atlantic. The North Atlantic is considered a stronghold for sub-adult to mature leatherback sea turtles (Doyle et al., 2008) due to food abundance. The Bay of Biscay and Iberian Coast is considered a 'high-use area' within the North-East Atlantic that plays a central role in the feeding ecology of some individuals.

83%

## Action Highlights

Each Recommendation requires Contracting Parties to report on the methods used to implement the measures. The methods are Legislation, Administrative action and Negotiated agreement, or any combination of these. Recent examples include:

1. France, Spain, and the UK have introduced national legislation;
2. France has a national action plan;
3. Regulation of plastic bag use has been implemented in France and the UK;
4. Spain is developing a national strategy for the conservation of marine turtles;
5. Spain has introduced specific measures to address pollutants and their effects;
6. France, Spain and the UK have a range of monitoring programmes in place;
7. Spain has MPAs and is undertaking research to identify other significant areas;
8. Spain and the UK have national response systems for marine pollution;
9. France, Spain, and the UK undertake a range of awareness raising activities, including teaching fishermen how to release accidentally caught turtles;
10. France and the UK undertake conservation activities in overseas territories.

## Engagement

The engagement index (left) measures how well Contracting Parties have engaged with the national measures in the Recommendation. The higher the score the greater the number of actions that Contracting Parties, which have reported, have taken to implement the measures in the Recommendation. Click here for more information on the index.

## Condition

In contrast to loggerhead turtles, leatherback turtles appear to be most abundant during the summer when gelatinous prey is plentiful; this pattern most likely indicates active habitat selection by these large, endothermic marine turtles. There has been no observed decline of nesting populations in the Atlantic to date, and even in some cases there has been a dramatic increase that is probably due to an aggressive programme of beach protection and egg. Nevertheless, the international nature of this problem means that the species' survival will depend on cross border collaborations focused not only on the tropical nesting beaches, but also on the more temperate feeding grounds that lie thousands of kilometres away. Within the OSPAR maritime area, the main threats to this species come from fisheries activity and marine litter.



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### References:

Background Document for Leatherback turtle (*dermochelys coriacea*) (OSPAR Publication 421)  
OSPAR Recommendation 2013/06  
OSPAR List of Threatened and/or Declining Species and Habitats (Agreement 2008-06)