Managing marine turtles:
A study of marine turtle conservation science and policy.

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PETER RICHARDSON
ABSTRACT

Marine turtles are an ancient group of reptiles that have been used by humans as a source of protein for over 7,000 years. In recent decades, acknowledgement of the various threats to marine turtles, including the deleterious impact of historical and contemporary use on many populations, led the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to list all seven extant species of marine turtle on their Red List of Threatened Species. Consequently, marine turtles are often given protected status in the national legislation of countries around the world, despite the existence of ongoing use cultures in communities that live with marine turtles. Conservation strategies are challenged by the migratory nature of marine turtles, which have complex life histories typically involving the use of habitats in the jurisdictions of multiple sovereign states as well as the high seas. As a result, a suite of multi-lateral environmental agreements (MEAs) list marine turtles in the most highly protective categories. Thus, governments of sovereign states that have acceded to the various MEAs are committed to conservation strategies requiring national action and cooperative multi-lateral action, which can conflict with interests of communities with a tradition of marine turtle consumption. In this thesis I provide examples of how contemporary scientific research methods can elucidate the migratory behaviours of marine turtles, and can help define range of populations subject to national conservation action and use. I examine specific examples of how this information can inform national and multi-lateral conservation policies and strategies; how those policies and strategies interact and impact on traditional cultures of marine turtle use in the UK Overseas Territories in the Caribbean; and provide an example of the potential benefits of engaging stakeholders with contemporary research methods. This thesis highlights the utility of a multi-disciplinary approach to research underpinning marine turtle conservation and management, which acknowledges the limitations of MEAs and national government capacity, and which incorporates participation of those communities engaged in marine turtle consumption.
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