



***For immediate release***

**IUCN press statement**

## Vulnerable Olive Ridley turtles find diverse support in Orissa, India

**3 March 2009 (IUCN)** - The Dhamra Port project in Orissa has attracted considerable attention due to its proximity to vulnerable Olive Ridley turtle nesting grounds. The question is - can large infrastructure projects like this be environmentally sustainable? In a breakthrough workshop held by IUCN, developers and environmentalists have joined together to tackle this complex and controversial issue.

IUCN's Consultative Technical Workshop on Dhamra Port was held in Bhubaneswar, Orissa, India on 24-25 February 2009, and was followed by a trip to the port site. The interactive forum focused on IUCN's work to mitigate the impact of the Dhamra Port development on the Olive Ridley turtle. IUCN has been advising port developer Dhamra Port Company Ltd (DPCL), a joint venture between TATA Steel and Larsen and Toubro (L&T) on mitigation strategies.

*"Orissa is a poor state, but rich in natural resources. The port and other projects are required for its economic development. We also have rich biodiversity in Orissa, such as the Olive Ridley turtles, mangroves, and other flora and fauna. One disturbing fact is that there has been no mass-nesting at Gahirmatha since last year. There are too many factors, we need to study this. We need issues and suggestions thrown up and find a delicate balance between environment and development,"* said **Upendra Nath Behera, Commissioner-cum-Secretary, Forest & Environment Department, Government of Orissa**

The workshop brought together a diverse mix of government representatives, the private sector, leading local and international scientists, technical experts, academics and local community representatives. *"If this sort of an effort cannot solve a problem, nothing can – it is a valiant attempt. We have never seen this before"* said **Kinsuk Mitra, President, Winrock International India**

Participants discussed and debated scientific information and development agendas with the aim to ensure long-term security for Olive Ridley turtles and the ecosystems on which they depend. All participants widely agreed on the importance of the coastline south of the port, which is one of the world's largest mass nesting grounds for Olive Ridley turtles. *"This is an extremely unique and special area, a globally significant monument. It's not just sea turtles and arribadas, its horseshoe crabs and mangroves and birds and much much more. From what we have heard today, the area is important enough to be declared a World Heritage*

*Site”* said **Roderic Mast, Co-Chair, IUCN SSC Marine Turtle Specialist Group (MTSG) and Vice President, Conservation International.** Work on the World Heritage Site application has already begun.

Several major mitigation recommendations of IUCN are currently being implemented by DPCL, including use of turtle protective deflectors on dredgers and on lighting techniques to reduce sky glow that can confuse newborn turtles as they make their way from the beach to the sea. The work being undertaken may have much wider implications. *“Dhamra is just one port in the area. DPCL should enter into dialogue with other ports and other development sectors on how they can come up with a solution for a far reaching and far greater impact on the coastal habitat and biodiversity and not just turtles,”* Said **B C Choudhary, Wildlife Institute of India and IUCN SSC MTSG Member.**

Beyond these measures, workshop participants called for research on a range of other issues related to secondary development, beach erosion and climate change, among others. Interestingly, the most serious threat to turtle populations was identified as trawler fishing which often inadvertently traps and kills turtles in nets. This can be dramatically reduced by use of Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) on nets. But much more work is needed to introduce the practice in the area.

Further research was also recommended to better understand nesting and migration patterns of the Olive Ridley.

*“I was impressed by the openness of exchange and new suggestions on the way forward. We can use these to make Dhamra Port an outstanding example of sustainable development, which can lead a holistic approach to development in the area,”* said **Santosh Mohapatra, CEO, Dhamra Port Company Ltd.**

The recommendations from the workshop will be integrated into a comprehensive Environmental Management Plan for the port facility.

*“Eventually the port will be handed over to the Government of Orissa. Therefore a strong Environmental Management Plan is required. IUCN is using the sea turtle as an indicator species in this ecosystem, but the overall ecology of the area is critical. IUCN sees its work here as on-going, dynamic, participatory and forward looking”* said **Aban Marker Kabraji, Regional Director, IUCN Asia.**

#### **Notes to Editors:**

The workshop report will be available shortly on IUCN's website at [www.iucn.org/india/dhamra](http://www.iucn.org/india/dhamra)

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#### **About IUCN**

IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, helps the world find pragmatic solutions to our most pressing environment and development challenges by supporting scientific research; managing field projects all over the world; and bringing governments, NGOs, the UN, international conventions and companies together to develop policy, laws and best practice.

The world's oldest and largest global environmental network, IUCN is a democratic membership union with more than 1,000 government and NGO member organizations, and almost 11,000 volunteer scientists and experts in some 160 countries. IUCN's work is supported by over 1,000 professional staff in 60 offices and hundreds of partners in public, NGO and private sectors around the world. IUCN's headquarters are located in Gland, near Geneva, in Switzerland. [www.iucn.org](http://www.iucn.org)