
Mexico may face US import ban for killing thousands of sea turtles

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The Center for Biological Diversity announced on Tuesday that it has joined with Turtle Island Restoration Network to bring litigation that could put a ban on some Mexican imports in order to reduce the alarming loss of sea turtles that get caught in nets intended to catch halibut and sharks off California's Baja peninsula.

Sea turtle strandings have increased by 600 percent, scientists say, after 483 loggerheads were washed up dead over a long stretch of California coast. Turtles get caught in the nets and drown. Some make it to shore and die, while others may disappear to the bottom of the ocean, causing experts to believe mortality rates may be higher than estimated.

"Loggerhead sea turtles are in danger of going extinct, but Mexico's government is letting its fishermen entangle, hook and kill thousands of these amazing animals each year," said Sarah Uhlemann, a senior attorney with the



Center. "Mexico needs to use common-sense measures to prevent these thousands of unnecessary deaths. We need action on both sides of the border to avoid extinction.

These unique and long-living turtles are born on the shores of Japan and make their way 7,500 miles to the North Pacific Ocean to feeding grounds off the California coast line.

The Center states that US Pelly Amendment would allow Mexican fisheries practices to be fully recognized as diminishing the Inter-American Convention for the

Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles. This treaty expects Mexico and other nations, including the United States, to implement practices that reduce turtle by-catch to the "greatest extent possible".

Nonetheless, sea turtle mortality and by-catch remains substantially uncontrolled or regulated in Mexico. The Center's request comes after the US identified Mexico's fisheries in January for unacceptable numbers of sea turtle deaths.

Conservationists want Mexico to be formally sanctioned

under the Protected Living Marine Resources statute for failure to adopt sustainable measures to protect sea turtles. If the Obama administration agrees, then select imports from Mexico can be banned until they comply and lethal by-catch numbers are greatly reduced.

“The Pacific loggerheads are going extinct now, so we must end these sea turtle drownings now,” said Teri Shore, program director at Turtle Island Restoration Network (SeaTurtles.org). “Any delay in halting excess bycatch in Mexico’s fisheries spells doom for these vulnerable and long-lived sea turtles.”

Furthermore, marine conservationists have recently challenged the practice of gillnet by-catch from California fisheries that have produced a massive quantity of dead whales. In addition to whales and sea turtles, drift nets and gill nets also kill dolphins, sea lions, seals and other marine mammals.

The Center reports the US has successfully used Pelly Amendment sanctions in the past “to enforce whaling quotas and stop rhino and tiger trade in Taiwan.”