



**March 22, 2019**

**SLNT Participates in the Annual Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network (WIDECAST) Meeting**

By: SLNT Programme Officer – Conservation (South)  
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Saint Lucia was represented at the annual WIDECAST meeting which took place from March 19-21, 2019 in Paramaribo, Suriname. The team included Mr. Craig Henry, the Saint Lucia National Trust's (SLNT) Conservation Programme Officer, Mr. Vincent Clarke, who leads the SLNT's community marine turtle monitoring programme within the Pointe Sable Environmental Protection Area (PSEPA) and Dr. Marie Louise Felix, a private consultant and former Fisheries Officer.

The aim of the meeting was to share information on national and regional-level sea turtle research, management, and outreach programmes; to learn from peer experiences; to facilitate networking and partnerships; and to strengthen science-based conservation programming. This year the agenda included national reports, regional issue reviews and technical presentations and discussions in break out working group sessions which provided opportunities to explore areas of common interest.

The annual meeting usually brings together WIDECAST country coordinators, biologists, policy-makers, and educators from throughout the Wider Caribbean region and beyond. The Department of Fisheries (DOF) and the SLNT are both WIDECAST focal points for Saint Lucia. While the former has the legal mandate for the management of marine turtles (MT), both agencies have a long history of collaboration geared at the sustainable use of the resource. For instance, over the last 5 years, and with the assistance of the DOF, the SLNT developed and is implementing a comprehensive Turtle Management programme in Saint Lucia and in particular within the Pointe Sable Environmental Protection Area (PSEPA). This programme has focused on documenting nesting behaviour along the beaches within the PSEPA; supporting monitoring and enforcement efforts through training; and an outreach and education campaign targeting schools in the south of the island. Funding and other support to undertake these activities were provided by the Organisation of American States (OAS); Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI); the WIDECAST and more recently the Barbados Sea Turtle Project.

This year's meeting, hosted by [WWF Guianas](#) and Suriname WIDECAST Coordinating Office, highlighted a long and successful history of sea turtle research and conservation work in the host country Suriname, as well as in French Guiana and Guyana. For these territories there is the issue

of by-catch, that is the incidental catch of non-target marine species (including MT) by trawlers. This can have a devastating impact on marine biodiversity in general and in particular for MT populations in this region. In fact, World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Guianas hosted a Regional Leatherback By-catch Prioritization Workshop as a precursor to the WIDECAST meeting to bring more focused attention and best practices to stakeholders in order to address the issue.

In the Eastern Caribbean, the more pressing challenges are that of illegal harvesting, poaching and threats to MT and their habitats from plastic pollution, sand mining, coastal loss and sargassum. Dr. Marie Louise Felix presented on behalf of the Saint Lucian contingent on the topic – ‘A Decade of Conservation Challenges’. The presentation provided a summary of the MT policy evolution in Saint Lucia and the associated challenges which have impeded conservation efforts. The main species of interest in Saint Lucia are the Hawksbill, Green, Loggerhead and Leatherback MTs for which nesting and other types of data are generated, and management activities focused. Saint Lucia still has a legal MT fishery in which licensed fishers are permitted to hunt, slaughter and sell MT flesh (with the exception of the Leatherback). It is illegal to buy and sell MT eggs and to poach nesting females or their nests. The SLNT has signaled its support for the resumption of a moratorium on the fishery of MTs or in the least more stringent regulation regarding the fishery which is not as lucrative or in demand as other highly prized marine protein such as lobster and conch.

Unlike Saint Lucia, many other Caribbean countries have either stricter regulations or a ban on the harvesting of MT and have moved to more sustainable use of the resources, mainly in eco-tourism related activities, research programmes for young scholars, disease and vector control and studying MT migration patterns locally and globally.

For more information on how you could help the SLNT and other agencies to improve marine turtle (MT) management in Saint Lucia or obtain MT related material please contact Mr. Craig Henry at 454-5014 or email [southofficer@slunatrust.org](mailto:southofficer@slunatrust.org).



From left to right: SLNT volunteer marine turtle monitor - Mr. Vincent ‘Jeg’ Clarke, SLNT Conservation Programme Officer, Mr. Craig Henry and Ocean and Wildlife Officer, WWF Suriname, Mr. Micheal Hiwat.