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ENVIRONMENTAL LICENSING: A TOOL FOR SEA TURTLE CONSERVATION AT THE NORTHERN BAHIA STATE COAST, BRAZIL.

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During the seventies, society in general started to pay more attention towards development's negative impacts on Nature. Around the world, each government started to regulate enterprises in order to minimize their social and environmental harmful effects. In Brazil, the legal structure that aims this conciliation is the Environmental Policy, which establishes a series of regulations, and attributions gathered on the National Environmental System (SISNAMA) in 1981, and becoming one of its tools for the environmental licensing process. One of this regulations determines that potential impacting enterprises near sea turtle nesting areas, need to be evaluated by Centro Tamar, which is a government branch specialized in sea turtle conservation and protection, and connected to the Ministry of Environment. Through this evaluation it is possible to work together with the licensing agencies analyzing the proposed development projects and planning mitigation measures, such as locational alternatives and technological solutions, to adjust and alter the projects.

In 1980 Tamar began its sea turtle monitoring and conservation activities. Today, after 30 years of research, conservation, interaction with coastal communities, and with the gathered expertise, there is a better comprehension of these animals' life cycles.

The Northern Coast of Bahia State has worldwide known nesting sites for *Caretta caretta*, *Eretmochelys imbricata*, and *Lepidochelys olivacea*. It is also a beautiful stretch of the country's coastline. Until the year 2000 the region was sparsely occupied with very few small localities and a low population density. After that, large real state and touristic complexes arrived and land occupation grew faster. This has been a major State plan to improve local economy and has been heavily implemented. Since this coast is an important sea turtle rookery, all projects began to be analyzed to avoid damages to the nesting beaches. The outputs of all the knowledge accumulated reviewing projects and dealing with different situations are a group of tools and strategies to mitigate and avoid negative impacts on sea turtles. Sensitivity maps, lighting manuals, beach use guide were created as a way to publicize and give guidance to entrepreneurs as well as agencies personnel during the steps of creating a project and obtaining the environmental permits. In extremely important or high sensibility zones, creation of Protected Areas is being recommended. It is essential to maintain monitoring and presence to ensure correct attendance to guidelines and procedures, as well as to solve unpredicted situations. These activities have contributed on the capacitation of sea turtle specialists to act in hands on environmental management.

Open communication with stakeholders has allowed the establishment of directives, packages of measures and control actions that, if properly followed, we believe will ensure sea turtle conservation in the region.