Title: SITAMAR: CONNECTING SEA TURTLES INFORMATION TO REACH BETTER CONSERVATION ACTIONS IN BRAZIL

Description: Sea turtle conservation in Brazil begun in 1980 with the creation of Projeto TAMAR. Initially focused on protecting the main nesting beaches, the program expanded its activities to known coastal feeding grounds, and later started working with fisheries that somehow are related to sea turtles. Nowadays a network of 25 sea turtle protection and research stations configures this conservation initiative. Information and data have been generated on a daily basis along the years. The long-term biological monitoring needs to collect and retain high quality data on which assessments and research can rely on. Standardized protocols and training have being essential to achieve and assure quality. On the other hand, storing and managing data also needed to evolve along the years. The initial database was designed in Dbase. With the growth in number of records, along with the new analysis methods and possibilities, a more robust platform became necessary to keep and integrate different data types. Facilitate secure access to staff, as well as associated researchers and environmental agencies, was also necessary. In 2006, the database was upgraded to a system called SITAMAR. Using open source language, it has a centralized management, is cloud stored and provides easy access to upload and query data. It also has an integrated GIS tool to facilitate mapping and integration with other data sources and types. Statistics software can easily use the query's output. A comprehensive routine to collect and upload data includes validation procedures in different levels, after which data becomes available for use. Metadata are critical to proper interpretation of the data and is also stored. All the design process has been documented and can be consulted to understand the database tables, and their relationships, or other critical information necessary for evolutive maintenance. These changes gave new life to old and new data by making everything more accessible, becoming an invaluable information resource for present and future research. Potential applications are diverse, ranging from species assessment and distribution mapping, to more modern issues research such as climate change and the impact on sea turtles. The lessons learned along the years are: 1. Data management and quality assurance has to be a part of the program from the beginning; 2. Data are a long-term resource that can have continuous value, as availability and usability are kept updated; 3. Stakeholders must provide input to become part of the system design and requirements; 4. Updates and improvements can be developed by constant interaction between data manager and stakeholders; 5. It is important that all guidelines defined to join and use the system be gathered in a single document forming the information policy. A new stage for SITAMAR is beginning as it is being prepared to be used by the national government as the official sea turtle databank, bringing together all the research and conservation initiatives developed by different groups and universities.

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