

TRAFFIC

FACTSHEET



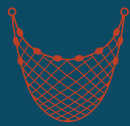
AUG 2026

MARINE TURTLE

EXPLOITATION AND TRADE IN VIETNAM

MARINE TURTLE TRADE IN VIETNAM (2010–2024): DECLINING SEIZURES, PERSISTENT THREATS, AND A SHIFT ONLINE

11,510 Marine Turtle Commodities Seized
Recorded Across Vietnam



95%

Seized
before
2016



1,495

Live
turtles
seized



7,641

Dead
turtles
seized

Hawksbill Turtle **CR**



544

Online Advertisements Recorded
Showing Illegal Turtle Trade Shifted
Onto Digital Platforms

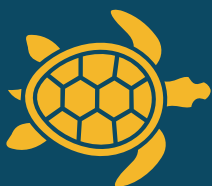


63%

listings appeared
on Facebook



Jewellery was the most
common product



5 Marine Turtle Species **Protected**
All Listed Under CITES **Appendix I**

Hawksbill Turtle

Green Turtle

Leatherback Turtle

Olive Ridley Turtle

Loggerhead Turtle

Critically Endangered

Endangered

Vulnerable

Vulnerable

Vulnerable



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1. OVERVIEW

Vietnam is home to five species of marine turtles: the Green Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*, Endangered), Hawksbill Turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*, Critically Endangered), Leatherback Turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*, Vulnerable), Loggerhead Turtle (*Caretta caretta*, Vulnerable), and Olive Ridley Turtle (*Lepidochelys olivacea*, Vulnerable). All five species are listed under CITES Appendix I, which prohibits their international trade for commercial purposes.

Among these, all except the Loggerhead Turtle have been documented nesting along Vietnam's beaches, (Hamann et al., 2006; Chu and Nguyen, 2015). Marine turtles have long been a part of Vietnam's coastal ecosystem, yet populations are in critical decline due to illegal wildlife trade, targeted and opportunistic fisheries, incidental catch from commercial and artisanal fisheries, habitat degradation, pollution, disease and climate change (Hamann et al., 2006; Stiles, 2009; Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia (IOSEA), 2014).

Beyond direct trade pressures, incidental catch (or bycatch) from gillnetting and trawling poses a significant threat to marine turtles in Vietnam, compounded by evidence that incidentally caught turtles are exploited to supply illegal demand for meat, shells, and eggs (Long and Son, 2023; Riskas et al., 2018; Gomez and Krishnasamy, 2019).

Despite these pressures, comprehensive data on marine turtle trade and consumption in Vietnam remains limited. This factsheet draws on four data sources to address this gap: seizure records covering international trade flows (2010-2024), an online market survey (2011-2024), a physical market survey (2023-2024), and an incidental catch survey (2023-2024).

¹ IUCN Red List Categories 2024



2. LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

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Vietnam has established an extensive multi-tiered legal structure to protect marine turtles, encompassing overarching laws, detailed decrees, and specific circulars. The foundation of this protection lies in the Penal Code 2015 (amended 2017, 2025), the Law on Fisheries 2017, and the Law on Biodiversity 2008. These laws are supplemented by sub-regulations such as Decree 26/2019/ND-CP, which classifies all five marine turtle species as “Group I” (highest conservation priority), and Circular 01/2022/TT-BNNNT, which mandates that fishers report any incidental captures in official logbooks. Additionally, long-term strategic visions are provided through national action plans, including the Program for Conservation of Endangered Turtle Species 2025 (Decision 1176/QĐ-TTg).

Recently, legal protections were significantly strengthened with the revised Penal Code (effective 2025). Wildlife crimes may be subject to penalties of up to 15 years’ imprisonment and fines of up to VND 2 billion (~USD 77,000) for individuals. For commercial legal entities, fines can reach up to VND 15-30 billion (~USD 557,000-1,154,000), depending on the severity of the offence and applicable provisions.²

Information Box on Legal Status of Marine Turtles in Vietnam

Legal status: Marine turtles in Vietnam	
Fully protected under national law	All five marine turtle species are protected under Decree 64/2019/ND-CP and the Law on Biodiversity 2008.
Incidentally caught turtles must be released alive	Any marine turtle incidentally caught during fishing operations must be released alive immediately.
No domestic trade permitted	The sale, purchase, or possession of any marine turtle part, including meat, shell, eggs, or derivatives, is prohibited under Vietnamese law.
No international commercial trade permitted	All five species are listed under CITES Appendix I, which prohibits international trade in marine turtles or their parts for commercial purposes.

Source: Decree 64/2019/ND-CP; Law on Biodiversity 2008; CITES Appendix I

3. SEIZURE DYNAMICS AND TREND ANALYSIS (2010-2024)

- **Recorded seizures declined:** Recorded illegal trade has decreased dramatically since 2018. Annual seizures dropped by over 50%, from an average of 10 cases per year (2010-2018) to approximately 5 cases per year (2019-2024).
- **Volume Distribution:** A total of 11,510 commodities were seized between 2010 and 2024. Notably, 95% (n=10,960) of these were confiscated before 2016, with only 5% (n=550) seized after that year.
- **Commodity Types:** Live turtles featured in 63% of incidents (n=116), totalling 1,495 individuals. However, the largest volume involved dead turtles, with at least 7,641 specimens seized across 15 incidents.
- **Reasoning for Trends:** Recorded seizures fell by more than 50% after 2018, a change that reflects enforcement activity as much as the scale of the trade itself.

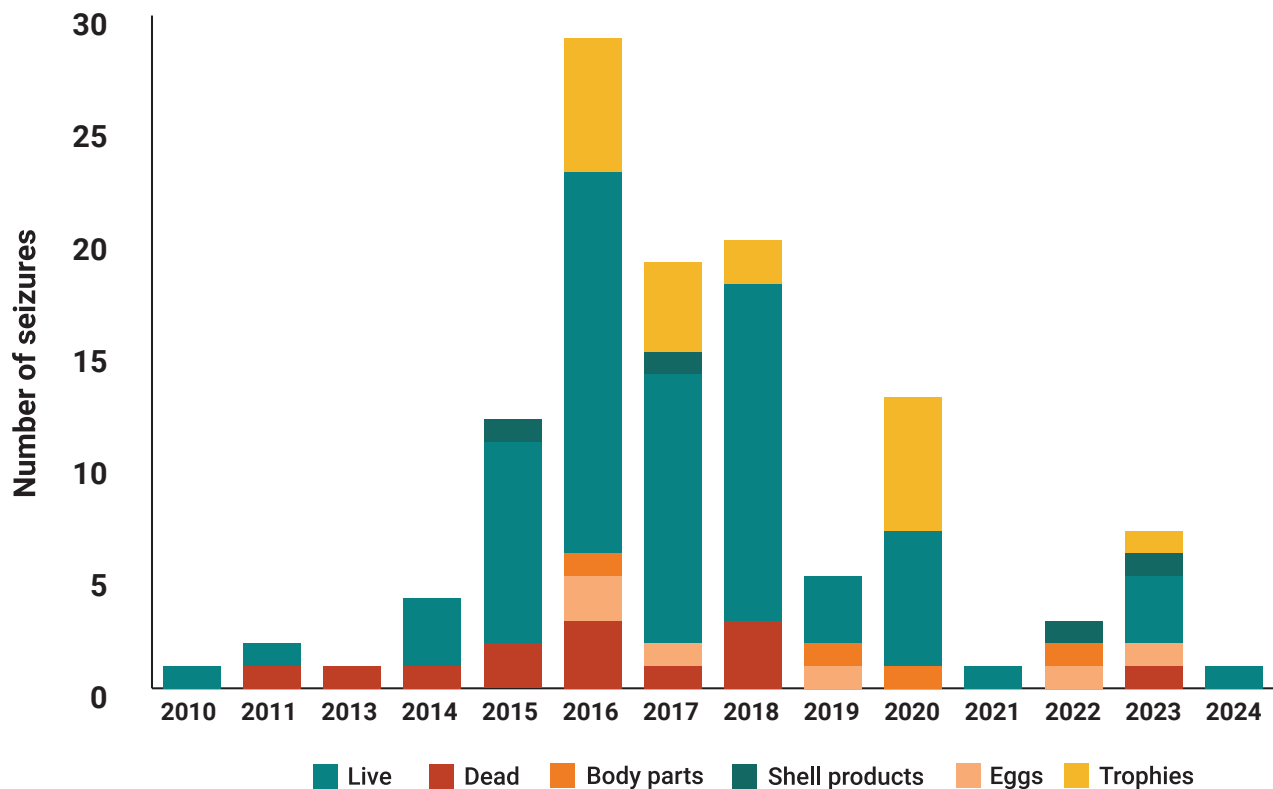


FIGURE 1

The number of marine turtle seizures and commodities seized in Vietnam from 2010 to 2024⁴. Seizure of body parts here includes meat, flippers, and organs.

³ [Marine turtle seizure in Vietnam](#)

⁴ No data available for 2012

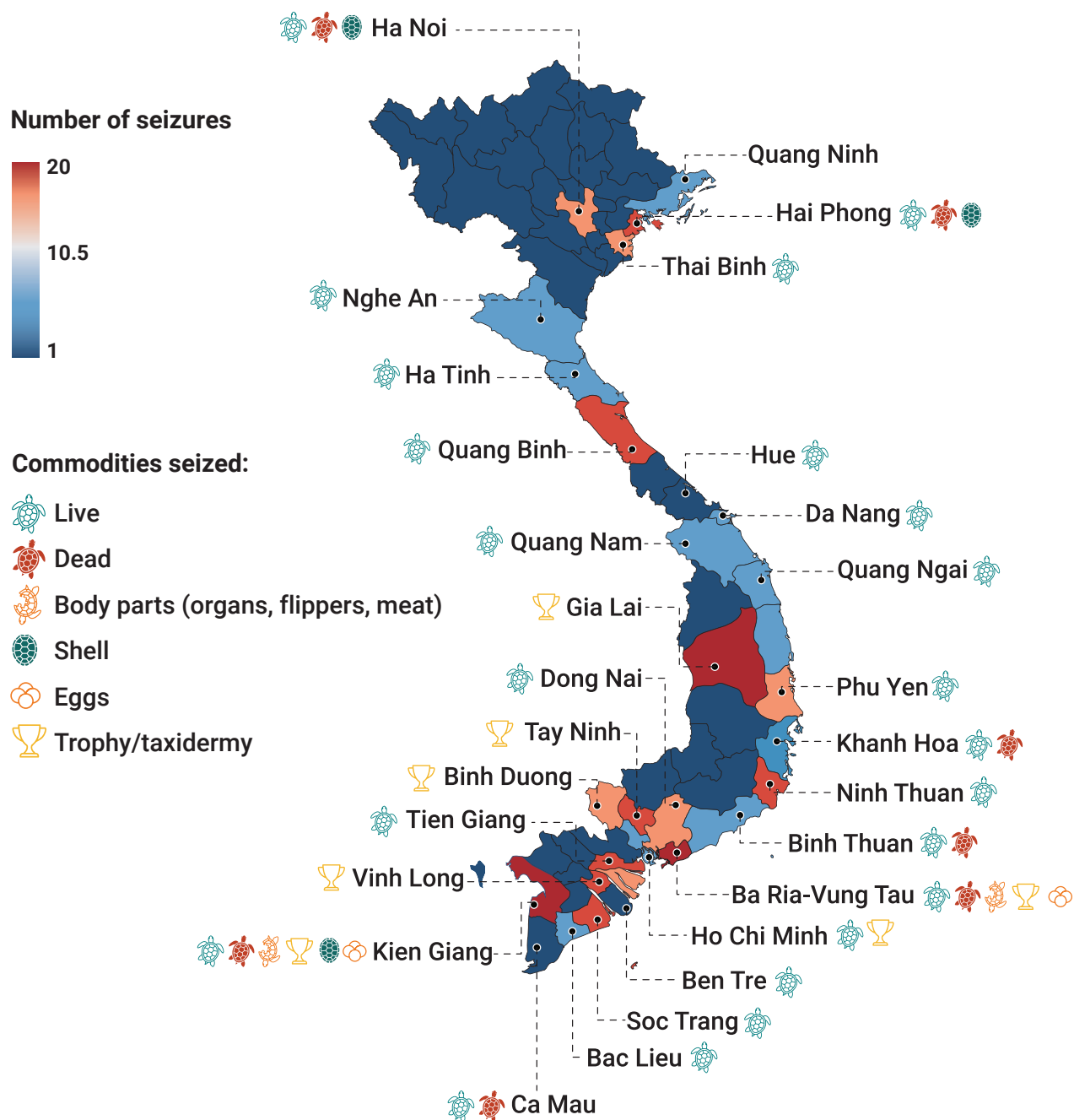


FIGURE 2
Location of marine turtle seizures across Vietnam from 2010 to 2024



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4. INTERNATIONAL TRADE (2010-2019)

International trade routes were extracted from ten seizures implicating several countries in the trafficking of marine turtles to and through Vietnam:

Country	Role	Incidents	Details
China	Destination	5	109 dead, 153 live, and 40 taxidermised Hawksbill Turtles; 1 taxidermized Green Turtle
Malaysia	Transit & Source	3	Transit: 1 mixed shipment of over one ton of dead marine turtles, turtle shells, and chameleons. Source: approximately 1,400 marine turtles (200 dead) and 1 live Olive Ridley Turtle confiscated from Vietnamese fishing vessels off the Malaysian coast
France	Transit	1	496 kg of Hawksbill Turtle shells originating from Haiti, transiting France en route to Vietnam
Philippines	Source	1	100 dead Hawksbill Turtles en route to Vietnam
Indonesia	Source	1	50 dead Hawksbill Turtles seized from a Vietnamese fishing vessel in Indonesian waters
Tanzania & Solomon Islands	Source	1	In a 2019 mixed-species shipment transiting through Viet Nam en route to China, both Tanzania and Solomon Islands were identified as source countries. However, the origin of one single taxidermised Green Turtle could not be attributed to either country specifically. ⁵

⁵

Part of a large mixed shipment transiting Vietnam destined for China, which also included significant quantities of mollusc shells, corals, shark fins, and various other protected reptile and mammal species.



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Vietnam's Role in Marine Turtle Trafficking

Available seizure data suggest that Vietnam functions primarily as a transit hub rather than an end market. Of the ten recorded seizures, at least five involved shipments passing through the country en route to China. China's strong consumer demand for wildlife products, combined with Vietnam's geographic proximity and developed port infrastructure, makes Vietnam the most convenient gateway for traffickers operating across the region.

Beyond logistics, Vietnamese fishing vessels were found actively collecting turtles in Malaysian and Indonesian waters, with one seizure alone involving approximately 1,400 animals. The scale of these hauls and the vessel's operation across multiple foreign jurisdictions suggest deliberate, targeted collection rather than opportunistic incidental catch.

The range of source countries, spanning the Caribbean, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Pacific, further suggests the existence of established operators in Vietnam capable of consolidating supply from multiple origins into a single trafficking corridor.



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5. MARKET SHIFT: FROM PHYSICAL TO DIGITAL

5.1. Physical Markets (2023-2024)

Physical market surveys of marine turtle products were conducted in 2023 and 2024 across six key provinces and cities (Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Nha Trang, Kien Giang, Ba Ria - Vung Tau, and Da Nang).

Note: administrative boundaries reflect pre-merger designations.

Summarised Table			
Indicator	Round 1 (January - June 2023)	Round 2 (November - December 2024)	Evaluation
Shops surveyed	53	51	Same shops revisited
Shops with turtle products	4 of 53 (~7.5%)	Same 4 shops	Products still present
Total items found	69 items	69 items	
Sales behaviour	Openly for sale	Shifted to display/ decoration only	This shift may reflect growing vendor awareness of enforcement risk rather than a genuine reduction in trade, as products remain accessible under the guise of decoration.
Locations affected	Ho Chi Minh City (67 items, 3 shops); Nha Trang (2 specimens, 1 shop)	Ho Chi Minh City (67 items, 3 shops); Nha Trang (2 specimens, 1 shop)	Same locations - no new locations identified
Clean locations	No products found in Hanoi, Da Nang, Kien Giang, or Ba Ria - Vung Tau	No products found in Hanoi, Da Nang, Kien Giang, or Ba Ria - Vung Tau	Same - no products found
Product types	Small personal accessories (bracelets, eyewear, hair clips, wallets) and 2 whole specimens	Small personal accessories (bracelets, eyewear, hair clips, wallets) and 2 whole specimens	Same stock retained
Vendor reasoning	N/A	Aware of penalties, kept old stock as decoration, as it could not be easily disposed of	designations

Overall assessment: Open sales at traditional markets have declined significantly and were absent entirely in Da Nang, Kien Giang, Ba Ria - Vung Tau, and Hanoi across both survey rounds. However, the persistence of unsold stock one year later highlights ongoing challenges in the effectiveness of enforcement.

5.2. Online Market Survey (2011-2024)

- **Methodology:** Online monitoring was conducted in two rounds. The first round, conducted in April 2023, covered five social media platforms (Facebook, Zalo, TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram) and 14 e-commerce platforms, including Tiki, Shopee, Sendo, Lazada, and several independent websites. The second round in December 2024 focused exclusively on the same five social media platforms. Across both rounds, listings collected span from 2011 to December 2024.
- **544** advertisements were between 2011 and 2024, of which 461 were posted between 2011 and 2024 and a further 83 had no date of posting. Posts advertised by 216 unique individual sellers and 11 Instagram groups.
- **Platforms:** Facebook dominated with 342 listings, accounting for 63% of the total. Followed by Instagram (70 listings), YouTube (27 listings), and others such as Lazada, Zalo, etc., (105 listings).
- **Products:** Most common items are jewellery, including necklaces (n=169 posts) and brooches (n=83 posts).
- **Price range:** Prices varied widely, reflecting a market spanning both mass and luxury segments from VND 15,000 (~USD 0.6) for a hair clip to VND 15,000,000 (~USD 581) for a live turtle.
- **Trading hotspots:** Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi were the two largest hubs, with 31 and 23 sellers identified by province, respectively.

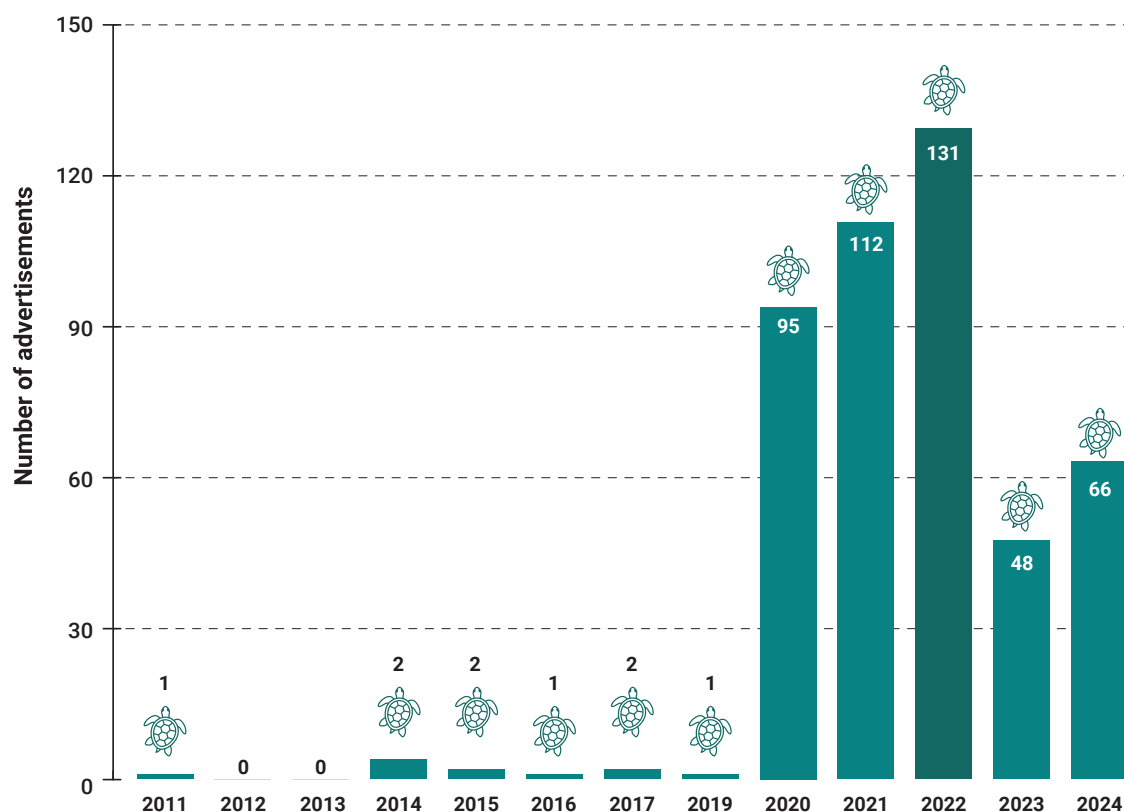


FIGURE 3

Number of advertisements for marine turtle products observed on online platforms in Vietnam from 2011 to 2024⁶.

Note

The persistence of identical stock across both survey rounds, with the same 69 items recorded in 2023 and 2024, suggests these products may represent older inventory rather than recent catches, though the online survey methodology could not confirm product age, as vendors typically disclose such details only through private channels or closed groups to buyers who demonstrate genuine purchase intent.

6. THE HIDDEN CRISIS: INCIDENTAL CATCH (2023-2024)

Incidental catch in fishing gear remains a critical but underreported threat.

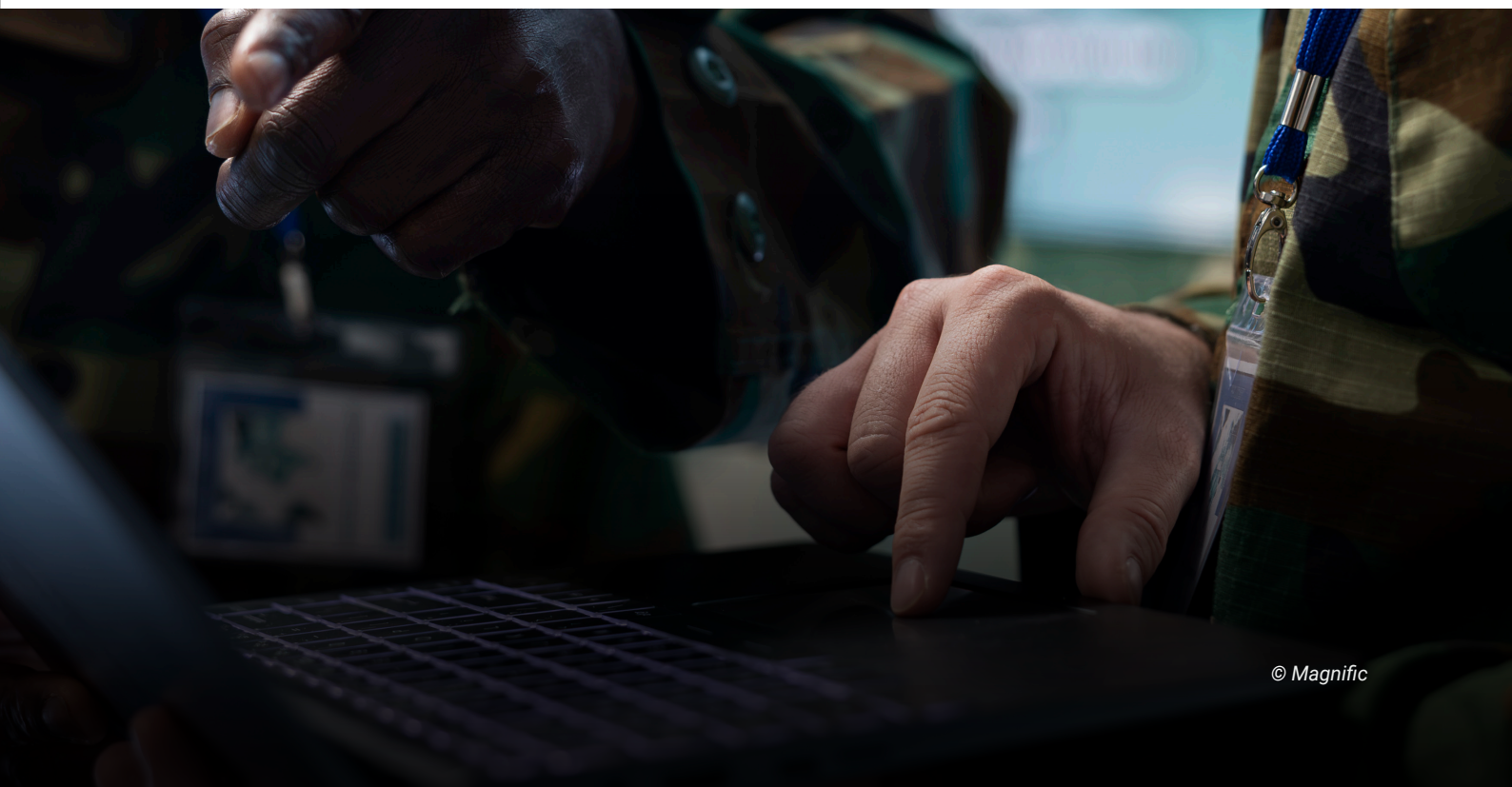
- **Fishers Surveys:**
 - 2023 Survey: 61% (n=38 of 62 fishers) reported incidental catches in the past 5 years.
 - 2024 Survey: 26% (n=28 of 110 fishers) reported incidental catches.
- **Discrepancy Analysis:** While in 2024 self-reporting was lower, 77% (n=85) of fishers believe other vessels still capture turtles and sometimes keep them for consumption. The lower reported rate in 2024 suggests reluctance to discuss incidental catch for fear of legal repercussions, difficulty capturing video evidence at sea, and unfamiliarity with reporting procedures, and gaps in the formal logging system, which has yet to record a single incidental catch incident in national data despite logbooks containing a dedicated field for endangered species. It is also possible that fewer turtles were caught due to population declines, a possibility noted by several interviewees.
- **Technological Gap:** None of the 110 surveyed fishers in 2024 reported using Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs).
- **Spiritual Beliefs:** 11% (n=12) of fishers in 2024 cited spiritual beliefs, noting that keeping turtles brings “bad luck,” which serves as a driver for releasing them.
- **Rate of release** if caught in the past 5 years: 97% (n=37) in 2023 survey and 96% (n=27) in 2024 survey.

7. ENFORCEMENT PROGRESS AND PERSISTENT GAPS:

INSIGHTS FROM GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS (2023)

The following summarises key findings from a small-scale survey of 11 government officials on marine turtle conservation and trade management. Given the limited sample size, these findings are indicative rather than representative.

- **Exploitation and trade:** All 11 officials interviewed reported that direct harvesting has ceased, attributing this to improved law enforcement and community awareness. None reported open retail sales of marine turtle products at the time of the survey.
- **Incidental catch:** 6 of 11 officials acknowledged that incidental capture in fishing gear remains ongoing. Despite fishing logbooks having fields for recording interactions with endangered species, no incidents have been formally logged in any reporting system to date - a significant data gap.
- **Policy and management framework:** 10 of 11 officials considered existing marine turtle conservation policies and mechanisms to be adequate. However, implementation remains inconsistent across localities.
- **Resource gaps and barriers:** Key constraints identified include insufficient funding for rescue operations and species identification training, a lack of on-vessel resources to support fishers in conducting at-sea releases, and the absence of formal incidental catch data, which limits the ability to quantify impacts and develop targeted mitigation strategies.



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8. SURVEY LIMITATION

- **Sample size and representativeness:** The small number of fishers and officials interviewed limits the extent to which findings can be generalised nationally.
- **Geographic and online coverage:** Physical market surveys were confined to selected locations, potentially missing emerging trade hotspots. Online monitoring was constrained by limited access to platform data, which limited visibility into advertisements and transactions.
- **Lack of independent verification:** The 97% self-reported release rate cannot be independently verified, nor can the authenticity of turtle products be observed in shops.
- **Reporting bias:** A significant gap between self-reported incidental catch (26%) and perceived peer rates (77%) suggests fishers are reluctant to disclose incidents, likely due to fear of legal consequences.
- **Practical documentation barriers:** Collecting photo or video evidence at sea is difficult, and recall of specific incidents often fades after extended fishing trips, reducing the accuracy of reports to authorities.
- **Seizure data accuracy:** Confiscation records do not fully reflect actual trade volumes, given the clandestine nature of wildlife crime and inconsistencies in how seizure data is recorded and reported.



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9. DISCUSSION: PATTERNS, GAPS, AND PRIORITIES

	The trade has become less visible, but any decline in its scale cannot be established from these data. Recorded seizures fell by more than 50% after 2018 and no products were openly on sale at the markets surveyed, yet online advertisements remained significant and persistent. Seizure figures reflect enforcement effort as well as trade volume, and the two monitoring rounds are not directly comparable. The findings point to a change in where the trade is visible, not a measurable reduction in its scale.
	Incidental catch is now one of the emerging threats. With 86,000+ vessels and 68% using high-risk gear, including gillnets and trawls known to incidentally catch marine turtles (Department of Fisheries Surveillance, 2022), incidental catch likely outweighs direct harvesting as a conservation risk. The gap between self-reported incidental catch (26%) and perceived peer rates (77%) points to significant under-reporting, compounded by a complete absence of official logbook records.
	Awareness without accountability has limits. Release rates are self-reported at 97% and 96% with no independent verification (equivalently incidental catch survey 2023 and 2024). Knowledge of the law has not produced documented compliance..
	The data gap is a governance failure. Unreliable data across trade, incidental catch, and enforcement reflect structural weaknesses that will continue to undermine evidence-based conservation.
	Where effort should shift. Incidental catch mitigation through gear modification and accessible reporting tools, such as Zalo (Vietnam's dominant messaging application) or dedicated hotlines, should now be the priority alongside continued trade suppression.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

FOR AUTHORITIES

Vietnam should introduce mandatory Turtle Excluder Device (TED) requirements as permit conditions for trawl and gillnet fisheries, prioritising high-interaction zones, and support this with amendments to relevant fisheries regulations.

Reporting: Simplify incidental catch reporting through digital platforms (such as Zalo, hotlines) and use incentives rather than penalties to encourage transparency.



Training: Integrate conservation modules into vessel licensing and distribute incidental catch reduction equipment and handling guidelines for the safe return of live turtles to the water

Digital enforcement: Strengthen partnerships with social media companies to monitor and remove advertisements using coded language or icons.

Addressing marine turtle products still on display (but not for sale) in shops: Research and propose a mechanism allowing shops and vendors to voluntarily surrender or dispose of marine turtle items held on display.

FOR NGOS AND COMMUNITIES

Supply chain mapping:

Map the trade chain from initial incidental catch to black market destinations to identify key intervention points.



Cultural engagement:

Collaborate with grassroots organizations to develop education materials that align with local spiritual beliefs.

FOR SOCIAL MEDIA AND E-COMMERCE COMPANIES

Strengthen monitoring of illegal wildlife trade online

Strengthen internal illegal wildlife trade identification capabilities

Encourage the development of internal screening capabilities to effectively identify new emerging coded text and imagery in the sale of marine turtles.



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AUGUST 2026

**WORKING TO ENSURE THAT TRADE IN WILD SPECIES
IS LEGAL AND SUSTAINABLE, FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE
PLANET AND PEOPLE.**

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