

October 13, 2009

Sra. Hannia M. Durán
Jefa de Area Comisión Permanente Especial de Ambiente
Asamblea Legislativa
San José, Costa Rica

Estimada Señora Durán:

RE: Law Project No. 17.383 entitled “Law to rectify the Leatherback Marine National Park’s Boundaries and Creation of Guanacaste’s Leatherback National Wildlife Refuge”

In 1995 Costa Rica recognized its unique responsibility in ensuring the continued survival of the Pacific leatherback by protecting one of the last nesting beaches in the eastern Pacific and the other delicate ecosystems of Ventanas, Grande, and Langosta Beach, through the creation of Las Baulas National Park by Law. Las Baulas National Park is critical to the survival of the Pacific leatherback sea turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*), declared as critically endangered by the World Conservation Union (IUCN). Populations of Pacific leatherback sea turtles have crashed by 90 percent over the past two decades and are not recovering. Today, fewer than 1,000 female leatherbacks survive in the entire eastern Pacific. Las Baulas National Park has an exceptional global value as it provides the most important nesting site for this remaining eastern Pacific population.

On behalf of the undersigned scientists we are writing to urge you to reject Law Project No. 17.383 pending before the Environment Commission of the Legislative Assembly, that proposes to downgrade Las Baulas National Park to a Mixed National Wildlife Refuge and open its beaches up to coastal construction projects. With Pacific leatherback sea turtles so perilously close to extinction it is inconceivable to remove this protection and allow development in sensitive areas near the turtles’ nesting sites. Such developments will have a negative impact on the nesting process of the leatherback through lighting, additional access of people, vehicles and domestic animals, and could likely lead to the elimination of this most important population of leatherbacks.

In addition, if this legislation is passed it will undermine Costa Rica's reputation as a global leader in conservation through its "Peace with Nature" initiative. This policy catapulted Costa Rica to the front of the line of countries committed to the preservation and protection of their natural resources and its longstanding commitment to the preservation of sea turtles.

Over the past few years multiple bills have been written, each one proposing to rezone Las Baulas National Park and open its beaches up to coastal construction projects. Fortunately every one of these bills has been rejected. We urge you to do the same with bill 17.383 and continue Costa Rica’s commitment to protecting the critically endangered leatherback sea turtle, and preserving its national parks and the extraordinary abundance of life protected within their boundaries.

Sincerely,

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