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Poor turtle landings reflect on department

KUALA LUMPUR: Questions are being raised over the efficacy of the Fisheries Department's Turtle Management and Conservation Programme following the drastic drop in turtle landings.

From the 2,986 landings recorded in 2004, only 1,676 turtles were spotted in 2005, said the Auditor-General's Report.

Between 2003 and 2005, RM1.91mil was spent on the programme and the amount did not include the state government's allocation and private sector contributions.

The report said the Turtle and Marine Ecosystem Centre attributed the decrease to tourism-related construction projects along beaches, the use of excessive lights, beach erosion, and pollution. In addition, the use of over 10in (25cm) *pukat pari* and an existing market for turtle egg, meat and shell also contributed to the problem.

The report said the Manjung district office in Perak did not issue licences to control turtle egg collection like in other states. To compound the problem, turtle landing spots in Terengganu, Malacca, Penang, Pahang and Perak have not been gazetted.

Lack of financial aid hinders the department from purchasing all the turtle eggs collected by the locals.

It also stops the department from hiring more workers, which in turn affects supervision of all the turtle management centres. Public awareness cannot be raised because of a lack of money.

In Perak and Malacca the department could not hire extra hands because the money meant to pay a worker could be used to buy 6,000 turtle eggs.

The report recommended that the department quicken the process to gazette the landing areas and monitor the programme closely to ensure that the guidelines are followed.