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**EP**



**United Nations  
Environment  
Programme**



UNEP(DEC)/MED WG. 308/Inf.5  
2 May 2007

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

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**MEDITERRANEAN ACTION PLAN**

Eighth Meeting of Focal Points for SPAs

Palermo, Italy, 6-9 June 2007

**Report on the evaluation of the implementation  
of the Action Plan for the conservation  
of Mediterranean marine turtles**

*For reasons of economy, this document will be available  
in a limited number at the meeting.  
You are kindly requested to bring your copy to the meeting.*

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Mediterranean Action Plan  
Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (RAC/SPA)  
Boulevard du leader Yasser Arafat  
B.P.337 –1080 Tunis CEDEX  
E-mail : [car-asp@rac-spa.org](mailto:car-asp@rac-spa.org)

The document has been prepared for the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (RAC/SPA), by:

Andreas DEMETROPOULOS  
President of Cyprus Wildlife Society (CWS)  
P.O. Box 4281  
Nicosia  
CYPRUS  
Fax: (+357.2) 350316  
Email: [andrecws@logos.cy.net](mailto:andrecws@logos.cy.net)

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The Parties to the Barcelona Convention included among their priority targets for the period 1985-1995 the protection of Mediterranean marine turtles (Genoa Declaration, September 1985). To this purpose and as a response to growing international concern about the status of marine turtles in the Mediterranean, which encounter various threats, including mortality in fishing gear and loss of vital habitats on land (nesting beaches), they adopted in 1989 the Action Plan for the Conservation of Mediterranean Marine Turtles. In 1996, the Parties confirmed their commitment to the conservation of marine turtles by including the 5 species of marine turtle recorded for the Mediterranean in the List of Endangered and Threatened Species annexed to the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (Barcelona, 1995). The Protocol calls on the Parties to continue to cooperate in implementing those action plans already adopted.

The Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine Turtles was revised in 1998-1999 and the revised Action Plan was adopted at the 11th Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention in Malta in October 1999.

Following the request of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention (Portoroz, 2005), RAC/SPA is preparing an update of the Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine Turtles in the Mediterranean to be submitted to the 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting of RAC/SPA National Focal Points.

With the aim of updating the Action Plan the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas RAC/SPA (UNEP/MAP) in collaboration and with the support of the Libyan Environmental General Authority (EGA), convened an ad hoc meeting of independent experts at Misuratah, Libya, 15-16 November 2006. The experts were present and acted in their personal capacity only and not as representatives of their countries or of any organizations they worked for or were members of.

The experts reviewed the old Action Plan in view of the experience and information gained since it was first implemented in 1999. Much of the present Action Plan was reviewed during that meeting. The Amended Action Plan was largely drafted following the recommendations of the Ad hoc meeting. The final draft was circulated to all the members of the group for their comments.

## **II. PROGRESS IN INCREASING KNOWLEDGE ON TURTLES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SINCE THE ACTION PLAN WAS FINALISED IN ARTA IN 1998.**

One of the reasons for updating the Action Plan was that much has happened in understanding turtles and their biology and conservation needs since the Action Plan was initially adopted in 1998. Knowledge and dissemination of information on turtles has been increasing rapidly in the last few years on a global basis. The more widespread application of up-to-date technologies and techniques in genetic research, satellite tracking etc as well as more work on more traditional research and conservation lines, in turtle biology and behaviour, have resulted in an unprecedented accumulation of knowledge.

Such rapid progress inevitably makes mandatory a more frequent revision of conservation plans and programmes, if they are to stay abreast and take advantage of current knowledge. The accumulation of knowledge from different parts of the world is often applicable

elsewhere and at all levels.

In the Mediterranean itself, much has happened since 1998 - but much remains to be done. There has been a proliferation of activities related to turtle conservation, both on land and more recently at sea. These now cover much of the Mediterranean and focus on most aspects of conservation, monitoring and research. Two very successful Conferences on marine turtles in the Mediterranean have taken place (in Rome in 2001 and at Kemer (Turkey) in 2005). The third Mediterranean Conference on Marine Turtles is planned to be held in Tunisia in 2008. These Conferences were jointly organised by the three Conventions operating in this field in the Mediterranean (the Barcelona, Bonn and Bern Conventions). Interest in marine turtles was such that in 2006 the International Sea Turtle Symposium (ISTS) was held in the Mediterranean for the first time (Crete, Greece). Meetings of the Mediterranean specialists present in the annual Symposia of the ISTS are now held annually at each Symposium.

In the years since 1998 much research and monitoring work has been done on Mediterranean marine turtles and many papers have been published not only in the Proceedings of the Mediterranean Conferences and the Sea Turtle Symposia but also in several scientific journals.

Key issues such as the genetic structure of the turtles in the Mediterranean and the degree of their isolation from the Atlantic populations is now a little better understood, though questions still persist. The use of nucleic and mitochondrial DNA (nDNA and mDNA) work, covering the paternal and maternal genetic makeup of turtles in the Mediterranean, has brought up new issues and has diversified information. The information available so far suggests a trickle of paternal genes into the Mediterranean green turtle gene pool – a trickle that was evidently large enough, on IUCN criteria, to lead of the conclusion that there is no genetically distinct green turtle Mediterranean “subpopulation”. This led to the delisting of the green turtles in the Mediterranean as Critically Endangered, pending of course further genetic work on these. The green turtles in the Mediterranean are now listed as Endangered, as are all green turtles globally. More work is obviously needed urgently in the Mediterranean, so that a better understanding of the genetic make up of turtles in this sea is achieved. Such work is now ongoing.

New information is now available on nesting areas. For example an important new nesting area for green turtles was found in Syria, while nesting sites of both species were found in Lebanon and have been monitored for some years. The nesting situation in Libya is now clearer and conservation activities have been developed; a comprehensive picture of nesting in that country is hopefully expected soon.

Foraging areas are getting better known though again more work is needed to identify all the key areas for the species. Migration key passages are now also being studied through satellite tracking and other observation, though more data are needed to understand routes and identify critical passages.

The situation on incidental catches in fishing gear has also been focused on in several studies, as is the fate of the turtles incidentally caught. Research projects on fishing gear modification to reduce incidental catches are still few, though these will hopefully yield valuable results.

Information has also been accumulating on the abundance of the Green and Loggerhead turtles in this sea. Inevitably estimates of populations and trends are based on numbers of nests on monitored beaches, extrapolated to females etc. Though there are well known problems with such a method it is still the main practical method of estimating abundance, provided that it is kept in mind that it does not take into consideration recruitment and hatchling/juvenile survival trends over the previous two or three decades. Estimating populations at sea (e.g., from the air) remains an alternative to be explored. This could give real-time information on populations, though other complications may provide biases (e.g., “migrant” turtles from the West Atlantic).

Chapter 11 in the Smithsonian book the “Loggerhead Sea Turtles” summarises the information available at that time (2003) on this species in the Mediterranean. It was estimated that the number of nests in the Mediterranean ranges between 3,375 and 7,085 p.a. These were deemed to be minimum figures as they refer to monitored beaches only and do not cover adequately some areas (e.g., Libya) for which there were no comprehensive data. This chapter also summarises the knowledge available at the time, on migrations, stock structure, threats, conservation, public awareness etc.

Red listing Regional Assessments for the three species in the Mediterranean, Leatherback, Green and Loggerhead turtles, were undertaken are ongoing. They aim at assessing the situation of these three species in this sea. The Leatherback Regional Assessment has already been completed, with the conclusion that this species was Data Deficient (DD) in this sea. The Regional Assessments have been undertaken under the auspices of the Mediterranean group of the Marine Turtle Specialist Group (IUCN/MTSG) and are being carried out for the IUCN Malaga Centre. The first drafts of the assessments for the loggerhead and green turtles are expected for the end of May 2007.

### **III. REGIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION PLAN**

RAC/SPA throughout the period of implementation of the Action Plan (1998 to the present) has catalysed the implementation of this Action Plan through a variety of initiatives and actions.

Assistance has been given to the countries every year in Capacity Building through the support of scientists, nominated by the countries, to attend training courses in Conservation Techniques and Beach Management held at Lara Reserve, Cyprus (these are 10 day, hands-on courses) and in Sea Turtle Rescue and Rehabilitation (Rescue Centres) at Stazione Zoologica Anton Dohrn, Naples, Italy (these are 5-day courses).

RAC/SPA also helped directly a variety of programmes for surveying, monitoring and research in several countries (Tunisia, Libya, Lebanon, Turkey and others). Through cooperation with Barcelona University it helped key genetic research into loggerhead turtle populations in the Mediterranean, with very interesting and useful results.

The publication by RAC/SPA of guidelines for: legislation to protect turtles, setting up and improving Rescue Centres, Sea Turtle Handling by Fishermen (the Fishermen’s Handbook), among others, was aimed at helping the Contracting Parties implement the Action Plan. These have been translated into different languages, according to needs. These can be obtained from RAC/SPA and are also downloadable from its website.

In order to help with tagging issues RAC/SPA set up a tagging working group that met in Kemer (Antalya, Turkey) just before the Second Mediterranean Conference on Marine Turtles (May, 2005) and came up with a set of tagging guidelines aimed at putting tagging issues into perspective, at recommending acceptable tagging techniques and at avoiding pointless and hazardous tagging activities. The tagging recommendations of the workshop were adopted by the MAP National Focal Point meeting and ultimately by the Contracting Parties meeting. They are now appended to the Revised Action Plan of which they form an integral part.

RAC/SPA in cooperation with the Bonn and Bern Conventions organised the two Mediterranean Conferences on Marine Turtles (in Rome 2001 and Kemer- Turkey 2005) and assisted a number of researchers to participate. It was also instrumental in the publication of the Proceedings, which are available for downloading from its website.

#### IV. EVALUATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION BY THE COUNTRIES OF THE ACTION PLAN FOR THE CONSERVATION OF MARINE TURTLES

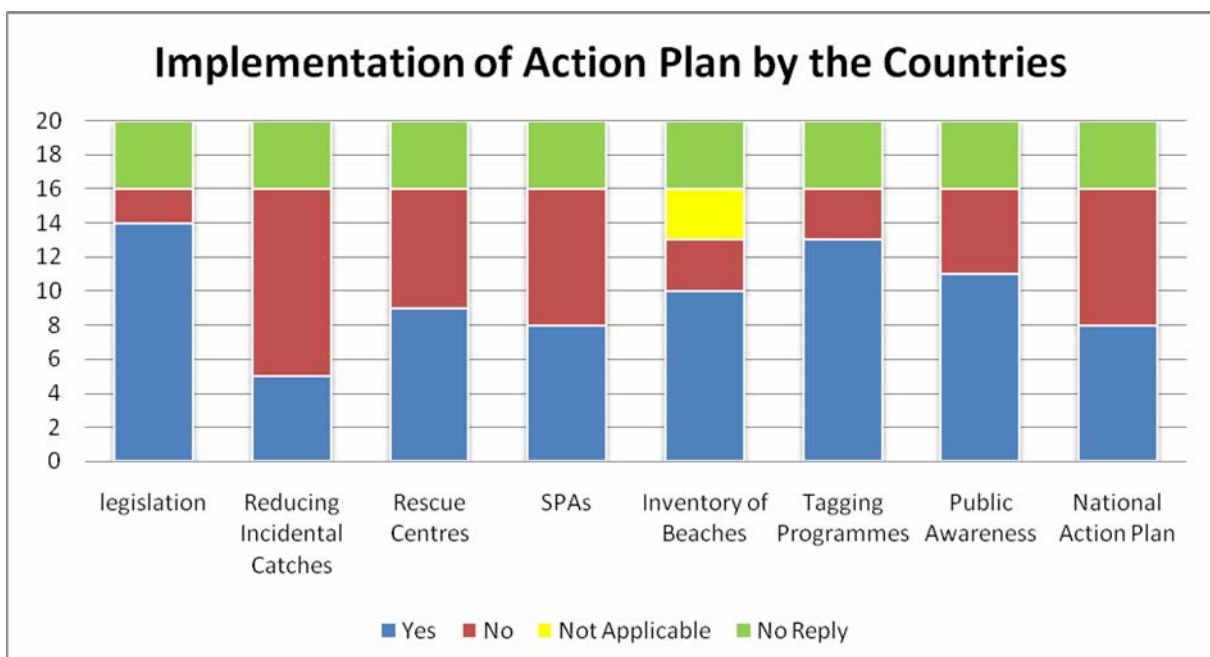
In an attempt to evaluate the degree of implementation of the Action Plan RAC/SPA sent to all the National Focal Points for Specially Protected Areas a questionnaire requesting that they complete this, giving where needed supplementary information (Annex 1). It is of course beyond the scope of this paper to compile and present all but the most important points.

The Graph below gives a summary of the responses to the questionnaire (see details in Annex 2). It is apparent from the answers that most countries have at least introduced legislation protecting turtles.

The implementation of measures to reduce incidental catches was the activity in which the countries were apparently more reluctant to embark on. In most cases many challenges were mentioned as preventing them from embarking of such activities. It is probable also that some misinterpretation of what this implies has caused a positive reply in some cases on this issue.

Through the responses to the questionnaire much useful information has been collected, not only on the degree of implementation of the Action Plan, but also on the problems faced by the countries in implementing its various components. These will be used in understanding and addressing problems during implementation of the Action Plan by RAC/SPA in the future.

No doubt more information and feedback from the countries will be needed during the next steps, towards understanding the real problems that need to be solved both at the regional and at the national and local levels for effective action.



#### V. THE UPDATED DRAFT ACTION PLAN

Many changes have been brought about in the Action Plan, from a technical/scientific perspective and in streamlining it with current conservation thinking. These include a clearer understanding of the various issues involved, such as distinctions as to: what is conservation, what is research and what is monitoring.



Major changes have been introduced in the Action Plan through the inclusion of an Implementation Timetable for actions and through the request that countries should prepare their own National Action Plan for the conservation of turtles and for regularly reporting on the implementation of the Action Plan.

Because the Action Plan was widely revised an indication in this document of the changes that were brought about, paragraph by paragraph, is not feasible.

**VI. Annex I**

Questionnaire Sent to National Focal Points for SPAs to evaluate the implementation of the Action Plan For the conservation of Marine turtles in the Mediterranean

Action plan for the conservation of marine turtles										
Level of Implementation				Areas of Improvement						
Article/ Paragraph/ Section	No.	Question	Level of Implementation <i>tick the MOST appropriate answer</i>		Issue	Challenges (tick the appropriate scenarios)				
						Improved access to knowledge and information	Improved public awareness at all levels	Better access to financial resources	Stronger technical capabilities	Stronger stakeholders participation
	1	Does the Party protect marine turtles by law?	Yes <sup>1</sup>							
			No		Granting a protection status to the marine turtles requires					
	2	Has the Party implemented measures to reduce incidental catch in marine turtles?	Yes <sup>2</sup>							
			No		Adopting such measures requires					
	3	Has the Party created centres to rescue marine turtles?	Yes <sup>3</sup>							
			No		This requires					

<sup>1</sup> Please Give reference to the law

<sup>2</sup> Please give a summary of the measure taken (1/2 page)

<sup>3</sup> Give the number, the intervention zone and if it is part of a stranding network

Action plan for the conservation of marine turtles										
Level of Implementation					Areas of Improvement					
Article/ Paragraph/ Section	No.	Question	Level of Implementation <i>tick the MOST appropriate answer</i>		Issue	Challenges (tick the appropriate scenarios)				
						Improved access to knowledge and information	Improved public awareness at all levels	Better access to financial resources	Stronger technical capabilities	Stronger stakeholders participation
	4	In the Party's territory, are there SPA created to conserve marine turtle populations or their potential habitats?	Yes <sup>4</sup>							
			No		Creating protected areas for marine turtles requires					
			Not needed, the species is not occurring in the country							
	5	Has the Party compiled an inventory of turtle nesting beaches?	Yes <sup>5</sup>							
			No		This requires					
	6	Is the Party participating in tagging programmes?	Yes <sup>6</sup>							
			No		Carrying out such programmes requires					

<sup>4</sup> Give a list with geographic coordinate if possible

<sup>5</sup> Give reference to this inventory (web link, report, etc...)

<sup>6</sup> Please provide the groups working on tagging, the type of tag used, the location etc...

Action plan for the conservation of marine turtles										
Level of Implementation				Areas of Improvement						
Article/ Paragraph/ Section	No.	Question	Level of Implementation <i>tick the MOST appropriate answer</i>		Issue	Challenges (tick the appropriate scenarios)				
						Improved access to knowledge and information	Improved public awareness at all levels	Better access to financial resources	Stronger technical capabilities	Stronger stakeholders participation
	7	Has the Party developed programmes for awareness raising, information and training concerning marine turtle conservation?	Yes <sup>7</sup>							
			No		Developing such programmes requires					
	8	Does the Party have an action plan for the conservation of marine turtles?	Yes							
			No		Elaborating the action plan requires					
			Not relevant because the species is not occurring in the country							

<sup>7</sup> Please specify if the manual for fishermen was translated and used in awareness campaign targeting Fishermen

## VII. Annex 2

### Summary of Implementation of Action Plan by the Countries

(The table below is based only on the replies received in relation to the RAC/SPA questionnaire)

Country	Legislation	Reducing Incidental Catches	Rescue Centres*	SPAs*	Inventory of Beaches	Tagging Programmes	Public Awareness	National Action Plan
Algeria	No	No	No	No	NA	No	No	No
Albania	Yes	No	No	No	NA	Yes	No	No
Croatia	Yes	No	Yes (1)	No	(Yes)*	Yes	No	No
Cyprus*	Yes	(No)*	Yes (1)	Yes (2)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Egypt	Yes	Yes	No	Yes (4)	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Greece	Yes	Yes	Yes (1)	Yes (9)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Israel	Yes	No	Yes (1)	Yes (21)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Italy	Yes	No*	No*	Yes (1)	No	No*	No*	No
Libya	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes (?)	Yes	Yes
Malta	Yes	No	Yes (1)	No	Yes*	Yes	Yes	No
Montenegro	Yes	No	No	Yes (?)	Yes (NA)	Yes	Yes	No
Slovenia	Yes	No	Yes (1)	No	NA (No)	Yes	Yes	No
Spain*	Yes	Yes	Yes (8)	Yes (20?)	No	Yes (16?)	Yes	Yes
Syria	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Tunisia	Yes	No	Yes (1)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Turkey	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

**NA:** Not applicable (no nesting)

\* **Croatia:** Beach surveys undertaken (No nesting)

\* **Cyprus:** Fishing is prohibited in area adjacent to protected nesting beaches (Lara- Toxeftra Reserve) to 20m isobath. Similar regulations are pending for Polis/Yialia Natura 2000 site. No measures have been taken for reducing incidental catches. All information refers to area of Cyprus under government control only.

\* **Italy:** On official level (Ministry of Environment), no implementation for Rescue Centres, Tagging, Reduction of Incidental Catches or Public Awareness, but: rescue centres and tagging is undertaken by various organisations (WWF-Fondazione Cetacea, Centro Studi Cetacei, Acquario di Genova, Stazione Zoologica Anton Dohrn – Naples etc.), also co-financing of projects for reduction of incidental catches, including public awareness materials, in Pelagian Islands

\* **Spain:** Numbers in brackets refer to Mediterranean area only (Barcelona Convention limits)

\* **Malta:** Nesting beach surveys are ongoing

\* **Rescue Centres and SPAs:** The numbers in brackets refer to the number of Rescue Centres and SPAs in that country