



**United Nations
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Programme**



UNEP(OCA)/MED WG.152/4
8 March 1999

ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

MEDITERRANEAN ACTION PLAN

Meeting of Experts on priority actions for
the implementation of the Action Plan for the
conservation of Mediterranean marine turtles

Tunis, Tunisia, 18-20 February 1999

REPORT

**MEETING OF EXPERTS ON PRIORITY ACTIONS FOR
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION PLAN FOR THE
CONSERVATION OF MEDITERRANEAN MARINE TURTLES**

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Introduction

1. The Meeting of Experts on the implementation of the Action Plan for the Conservation of Mediterranean Marine Turtles, held in Arta, Greece, from 27 to 29 October 1998, drew up a revised version of the Action Plan. The same meeting suggested the convening of a further meeting aimed at producing a list of priority actions to be submitted to the next Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties.
2. At its meeting held in Tripoli from 16 to 17 November 1998 the Bureau of the Contracting Parties approved the convening of this new meeting and agreed, at the suggestion of the Chair, to hold the meeting in Tunis. The French Government kindly offered financial support for its organization.
3. The Meeting of Experts on priority actions for the implementation of the Action Plan for the Conservation of Mediterranean Marine Turtles was held at the Hotel Belvédère, 10 Av. des Etats Unis d'Amérique, Tunis (Tunisia) from 18 to 20 February 1999.

Participation

4. Experts designated by the following Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention attended the Meeting: Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malta, Morocco, Monaco, Slovenia, Spain, Tunisia and Turkey.
5. Also represented at the Meeting, as observers, were the following inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations: the Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles (MEDASSET), MEDMARAVIS, the Cyprus Wildlife Society (CWS), the WorldWide Fund for Nature (WWF), the Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece (STPS), and the Acquario di Genova.
6. The Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (SPA/RAC) acted as the Secretariat of the Meeting.
7. The complete list of participants is attached as Annex I to the present report.

Agenda Item 1: Opening of the Meeting

8. The Meeting, placed under the high patronage of His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Mehdi Mlika, Minister of the Environment and Land Use Planning and President of the Mediterranean Action Plan, was opened at 9.30 a.m. on Thursday, 18 February 1999, by Mr Mohamed Adel Hentati, the Director of RAC/SPA.

Agenda Item 2: Rules of Procedure

9. The Meeting noted that the Rules of Procedure adopted for meetings and conferences of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution and its Protocols (UNEP/IG.43/6, Annex XI), as amended by its Eighth Ordinary Meeting, would apply *mutatis mutandis* to its deliberations.

Agenda item 3: Election of Officers

10. In accordance with Rule 20 of the Rules of Procedure, and after the usual informal consultations, the Meeting recommended that the Bureau elected at Arta remain unchanged; this proposal was unanimously approved. The Bureau was made up of the following Members:

Chairperson:	Mr Dimitris Margaritoulis (Greece)
Vice-Chairpersons:	Ms Ebru Kamiloglu (Turkey)
	Mr Abdulmaula Abdelmagid Hamza (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)
Rapporteur:	Mr Jean Lescure (France)

Agenda Item 4: Adoption of the Agenda and Organization of Work

11. The Meeting adopted its Agenda, based on the provisional agenda contained in document UNEP(OCA)/MED WG.152/1. This Agenda appears in Annex II. The Meeting also agreed to follow the schedule of work proposed by the Secretariat as set out in the annotated provisional agenda contained in document UNEP(OCA)/MED 152/2.

Agenda Item 5: Implementation of the Action Plan for the Conservation of Mediterranean Marine Turtles : priorities for research and conservation

12. The representative of the Secretariat presented document UNEP(OCA)/MED WG.152/3, containing a suggestion for priority actions for the implementation of the Action Plan for the Conservation of Mediterranean Marine Turtles. The document had been prepared by the Secretariat on the basis of a comparative analysis of the most recent reports concerning research on and conservation of marine turtles in the Mediterranean. The first part of the document suggested priority actions whose implementation was expected at regional and/or sub-regional level, as well as actions to be undertaken at national and/or local level concerning almost all the Mediterranean countries. The second section of the document assembled recommendations for priority actions by country.

13. First of all, the meeting was requested to consider the status of the document that was to be drafted, and its structure. After discussion, the following points were agreed on:

- the meeting's final product should be a document indicating priority actions for the implementing of the Action Plan, to which it would form an annex. The list of identified actions would be offered for review at the next meeting of the Focal Points for Specially Protected Areas, and for adoption at the next meeting of the Contracting Parties;
- implementation of the priority actions should be evaluated periodically, and at the same time the list should be revised if necessary; in this respect, a 5-year period was indicated as being reasonable.

14. The meeting then started on a paragraph-by-paragraph examination of the document. The text of the revised version of the document appears in Annex III to the present report.

15. During the discussions about the various actions, the following major points were raised.

16. As regards inventories, an in-depth debate took place concerning the subject, purpose and procedures for their preparation. The following points were agreed on:
- the regional inventory should take into consideration all the critical habitats of marine turtles;
 - the inventory being a knowledge-enhancing instrument, a site's being included in the inventory would not necessarily entail obligations on the part of the concerned country as regards its protection;
 - concerning procedure, the regional inventory should be drawn up on the basis of national reports made by the countries, according to an agreed procedure.

17. The meeting considered that it was previously to be recommended that the next meeting of the Focal Points for Specially Protected Areas review the wording of paragraph 20 of the amended Action Plan. In this respect, the following draft was suggested by the meeting:

"An inventory of marine turtle critical habitats, including migration routes, in the Mediterranean should be prepared urgently, and should be regularly reviewed in the light of increased knowledge."

18. A discussion took place concerning rescue centres. The participants recognised their usefulness, particularly for rescuing and rehabilitating turtles incidentally caught by fisheries, thereby reducing mortality, and recommended the setting up of other centres of this kind. To this end, the meeting considered it useful to establish guidelines relative to the design and functioning of these structures. In this respect, several speakers stressed the fact that these centres would be operating in differing circumstances and with differing requirements, and recommended the elaborating of guidelines that were sufficiently flexible.

19. The meeting recognised the importance of a rapprochement between the conservation and fishing sectors on the issue of interaction between marine turtles and fisheries. It was suggested that the RAC/SPA should try to make contact in a first phase with the national administrations in charge of fishing, and with the pertinent international and regional bodies active in the Mediterranean, in particular the FAO-GFCM and ICCAT. In this respect, the meeting strongly recommended that the RAC/SPA take part in the next meeting of the Scientific Committee of GFCM (Rome, March 1999) and the meeting of the ICCAT sub-committee on by-catch (Messina, May 1999).

20. As regards research on interaction between marine turtles and fisheries, certain delegates stressed the difficulties involved in undertaking this kind of study, particularly in view of the high cost. The WWF representative described the project "Assessing Marine Turtle bycatch in European drifting longlines and trawl fisheries for identifying fishing regulations", established between Spain, France, Italy and Greece, and co-funded by the D.G.XIV of the European Commission. The Spanish delegate referred to the existence of the COPEMED programme of FAO funded by Spain, which permits the funding of research projects concerning fishing in the western Mediterranean, including the North African countries. In this respect, he suggested setting up via the RAC/SPA a project whose aim would be to extend the above-mentioned project to other countries eligible for COPEMED funding. The existence of a similar programme for the Adriatic Sea funded by Italy, ADRIAMED, was also reported. Two other projects carried out in the Mediterranean Sea Area on the impact of long-line fisheries were mentioned. The first one, funded by the Italian Directorate-General for Fishery and Aquaculture and implemented by WWF, was undertaken by scientific observers in the central and southern Mediterranean and implied the assessment of by-catch. The other, funded by the D.G. for Fisheries of the EC and implemented by several Greek and Italian scientific institutes, concerned the assessment by direct observation on board of the physical conditions of the various species affected by long-line catches. Both projects were expected to be completed in the year 2000. Still on the subject of research, the opportuneness of supporting the setting up of research centres in the countries of the south and east Mediterranean was also evoked.

21. The meeting responded very favourably to the proposal to convene a Mediterranean conference on marine turtles, to be jointly organised by the RAC/SPA and the Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals, in collaboration with other concerned organisations. Here a written note sent by the Secretariat of the Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals was distributed to participants. A discussion followed concerning the terms on which this Conference would be organised. The meeting agreed that the Conference should be established on a permanent basis and be regularly convened. Several speakers indicated the opportuneness of referring to the model of the "Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation", ordinarily convened in the United States. Priority should be given to the scientific aspects, in order to encourage Mediterranean researchers to present and publish the results of their research activities. In this respect, particular attention should be paid to the publishing of the proceedings of the Conference. The opportuneness of involving the GFCM and ICCAT was also indicated. To be able to hold the first conference in the year 2000, certain crucial matters such as the place and funding should be defined as soon as possible.

22. Following the suggestion made by one delegation, the creation of a Mediterranean newsletter and a newsgroup on marine turtles under the auspices of the RAC/SPA was approved, the main objective of these initiatives being to encourage the communication and exchange of experience and ideas between researchers and conservationists in the region. It was recommended that care should be taken to avoid duplicating work being done with already existing tools, such as the Marine Turtle Newsletter and the Cturtle LIST newsgroup. As regards the newsletter in particular, it was suggested that it should be simple.

23. During the discussion concerning priority actions at national level, several experts representing the Parties, in particular the representatives of Albania, Croatia and Lebanon, expressed a need to improve research and conservation capacities in their respective countries through training programmes, and asked for RAC/SPA support to this end.

24. The meeting recommended that particular support be provided to Egypt in order to allow it to study the impact of fisheries on marine turtles and the possible existence of a feeding area for these in the marine area off the Nile Delta.

Agenda item 6: Any other matters

25. None

Agenda item 7: Adoption of the report of the Meeting

26. The draft report of the Meeting and the annex containing the draft priority actions for the implementation of the Action Plan for the conservation of Mediterranean marine turtles were adopted by the participants. The above annex will be submitted for adoption to the next meeting of the Contracting Parties.

Agenda item 8: Closure of the Meeting

27. After the customary exchange of courtesies, the Chairperson declared the Meeting closed on Saturday 20 February 1999 at 8.30 p.m.

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ANNEX II

AGENDA

1. Opening of the Meeting
2. Rules of procedure
3. Election of officers
4. Adoption of the Agenda and organization of work
5. Implementation of the Action Plan for the conservation of Mediterranean marine turtles : priorities for research and conservation
6. Any other matters
7. Adoption of the report of the meeting
8. Closure of the meeting

ANNEX III

PROPOSED PRIORITY ACTIONS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION PLAN FOR THE CONSERVATION OF MEDITERRANEAN MARINE TURTLES

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS AT THE REGIONAL AND SUB-REGIONAL LEVELS

A. PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT

A.1 Legislation

- *Elaborate guidelines to design legislation and regulations relative to the conservation and management of marine turtle populations and their habitats, taking into account the need to enforce existing international legislation.*

A.3 Reducing Mortality at Sea and Eliminating Local Consumption and Use

- *Establish guidelines to improve the involvement of marine turtle rescue centres as an additional tool to reduce mortality. Establish a network of centres that comply with such guidelines.*

A.4 Establishment of a Mediterranean Network of Marine and Coastal Protected Areas for Marine Turtles

- *Prepare an inventory of nesting areas, of those areas known for mating, feeding and wintering, and of migration routes all around the Mediterranean, which should subsequently be regularly updated. Compile and synthesize information on these areas in an Atlas.*
- *Establish a network of managed and monitored nesting sites, with the aim of facilitating the exchange of information and experience.*

A.5 Information, Education and Training

- *Prepare training and information/awareness modules and tools addressed to fishermen, aimed at reducing the mortality of marine turtles incidentally caught in fishing gear.*
- *Support the continuation of training courses for Mediterranean scientists and SPA managers in marine turtle conservation techniques.*

B. SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND MONITORING

B.1 Scientific Research

- *Encourage the elaboration and execution of cooperative research projects of regional importance aimed at*
 - *assessing the interaction between turtles and fisheries;*
 - *identifying marine turtle critical habitats, including migration routes.*
- *Promote the development of management techniques for nesting beaches.*
- *Encourage standardization of methodologies to estimate demographic parameters for population dynamics analysis, such as population modelling.*

B.2 Monitoring

- *Encourage:*
 - *long-term beach monitoring programmes;*
 - *saturation tagging and genetic analysis, to be used where appropriate;*
 - *cooperation among beach monitoring programmes in order to have compatibility in data collection and analysis, and thus detect population trends and their response to management policies.*

C. COORDINATION

- *Convene the first Mediterranean Conference on marine turtles.*
- *Open a dialogue with fishing administrations and stakeholders in the marine environment, to discuss fishing techniques and their impact and the possibilities of improving such techniques.*
- *Create:*
 - *a Mediterranean newsletter on marine turtles that could be eventually developed and incorporated in a specific Web site;*
 - *a Mediterranean newsgroup.*
- *Establish a directory of sea turtle specialists working in the Mediterranean.*

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

Acknowledging the progress achieved over the past years and the proliferation of projects, activities and actions in many countries it is considered a priority action to continue and enhance ongoing projects and activities related to marine turtle conservation, research and monitoring.

The following recommendations apply to all, or most countries :

- *Develop education and training programmes for fishermen on techniques for*

correctly hauling, handling, releasing and recording incidentally caught turtles, with possible support from and cooperation with GFCM and ICCAT. Involvement of existing rescue centres and aquariums should be sought.

- *Develop systematic public awareness projects, structured in such a way that the objectives and target groups are clearly defined. Some of the main target groups involve local residents and tourists at nesting sites, local and national authorities, schoolchildren, fishermen, yachtsmen and other sea users. The establishment of such programmes could be triggered and assisted by appropriate regional initiatives.*

Specific additional proposals for individual countries follow.

Albania

- *Grant full legal protection to marine turtles.*
- *Undertake a prospection campaign to assess the occurrence of marine turtle nesting on Albanian coasts.*

Algeria

- [- *Speed up procedures for the enacting of legal texts granting protection to marine turtles.*]
- [- *Establish a monitoring programme on by-catches of marine turtles by Algerian fisheries.*]

Bosnia and Herzegovina

No additional actions recommended.

Croatia

- *Develop research and monitoring on Caretta caretta in Croatian waters, focused on the following main topics:*
 - *overwintering and feeding areas and ecology;*
 - *migration patterns, population structure and dynamics ;*
 - *interaction with fisheries.*
- *Undertake a prospection campaign to assess the occurrence of marine turtle nesting on Mljet island sandy beaches.*
- *Strengthen the legal protection for the sandy habitats of Saprunara and Blace Bays by moving them from the present "protected landscape" category to the "protected botanical and zoological reserve" category.*
- *Establish bottom trawling restrictions in northern Croatian waters throughout the*

winter in areas where the sea is less than 50 m deep.

- *Establish a network of rescue centres along the Croatian coasts.*

Cyprus

- *Ensure the long-term conservation of nesting beaches by including their adequate protection and management in all coastal management plans, notably in relation to tourist development, and by including the most important nesting beaches in a long-term monitoring and protection plan.*
- *Finalize the Conservation Management Plan for the Akamas peninsula, based on the METAP study, and implement it.*
- *Pursue the project on the hatching and rearing of juvenile stages (head-starting) of green turtles, and assess its results in terms of its impact on the wild population.*

Egypt

- *Reduce substantially, and finally eliminate, intentional mortality by:*
 - *enforcing existing legislation protecting marine turtles and promulgating new protection texts where necessary;*
 - *establishing well-targeted environmental education and public awareness programmes for key Mediterranean coastal communities where sea turtle consumption still takes place.*
- *Create and enforce specific regulations for the reduction of by-catch and fishery-related mortality caused by bottom trawl and by small coastal fisheries.*
- *Identify and implement adequate protection and management measures for the most important nesting beaches along the Mediterranean coast.*

France

- *Set up a programme to estimate incidental capture by the various fisheries within the framework of a specific sampling plan.*
- *Develop the network of observers along the Mediterranean coast of France.*
- *Determine the origin of turtles caught in French waters.*

Greece

- *See to continue monitoring the nesting population and take effective management measures at all "major" nesting areas.*
- [- *Finalize the process of setting up the Zakynthos National Marine Park and its managing body, and monitor the enforcement of the relevant conservation and*

management measures.]

- *Grant adequate protection and management to, and where appropriate restore, other important nesting areas, in particular: the Bay of Kyparissia, Rethymno, Lakonikos Bay, the Bay of Chania, Bay of Messara.*
- *Assess sea turtle mortality caused by fisheries' interactions and powered pleasure boats, and elaborate relevant conservation measures.*
- *Develop a nation-wide stranding network and improve existing facilities for rehabilitation of injured and sick turtles.*
- *Initiate research programmes aimed at:*
 - *identifying feeding and/or wintering areas along Greek coasts, and*
 - *assessing discreteness of nesting populations (through genetic studies).*

Israel

- *Ensure long-term protection of major and potential nesting beaches.*
- *Promote the process of legal declaration of protected marine and coastal areas.*
- *Eliminate both destructive human activities on nesting beaches and the disorientation of hatchlings caused by artificial light.*

Italy

- *Assess the impact of Italian fisheries on marine turtle populations, particularly in the Ionian Sea and the Sicily Channel.*
- *Envisage management and protection measures in the most sensitive areas.*
- *Ensure the protection of the few remaining nesting beaches, having them integrated in any possible development plan, and provide a commitment to long-term monitoring.*
- *Anticipate monitoring of other potential nesting sites.*
- *Pursue or support research to identify feeding and wintering areas and migration routes.*
- *Continue to develop the network of observers along the Italian coast.*

Lebanon

- *Enact legislation banning the consumption and sale of products derived from sea turtles.*

- *Undertake a survey aimed at assessing sea turtle nesting and potential nesting sites, feeding and wintering areas on the coast of Lebanon.*
- *Establish a programme for the long-term monitoring of sea turtle nesting in the Palm Island reserve.*
- *Prepare a National Action Plan for the conservation of marine turtles in Lebanon.*

Libya

- *Further study the dimension of the nesting populations and nesting distribution along the coasts.*
- *Identify the most valuable nesting beaches, grant them adequate long-term protection and management and include them in a long-term monitoring programme. The following beaches are already identified as deserving special attention: Eastern beach of Ain-Algazala, Aboulfraes, Kouf National Park, Al-Ghbeba.*
- *Assess the impact of coastal fisheries on marine turtles.*

Malta

- *Assess the impact of fisheries' by-catches.*

Monaco

- *Activate the procedure of legal protection for marine turtles.*

Morocco

- *Activate the procedure of legal protection for marine turtles.*
- *Strengthen the monitoring programme on by-catches of marine turtles by Moroccan fisheries.*

Slovenia

No additional action recommended.

Spain

- *Ensure periodical assessment of the fisheries' impact in the Balearic G.F.C.M. area (Spanish Mediterranean Area).*
- *Develop research programmes aimed at*

- identifying marine turtle migratory patterns in the Gibraltar Strait region;
- evaluating the percentage of turtles of Atlantic and/or Mediterranean origin in the Alboran Sea and connected waters.

- Establish a network of stranding observers and rescue centres along the Mediterranean coasts of Spain, with a view to harmonizing rescue methodologies and establishing a common database on stranded and rescued turtles in the Mediterranean.

Syria

- [- Undertake a survey aimed at assessing sea turtle nesting on the coast of Syria.]

Tunisia

- Elaborate specific legislation for marine turtles.
- Develop research and monitoring programmes aimed at:
 - assessing by-catches and related mortality, particularly in the Gulf of Gabes;
 - assessing the value of the Gulf of Gabes as a feeding/overwintering area;
 - identifying possible nesting sites as yet unknown.
- Grant the nesting sites on the Kuriat islands adequate protection and management, and include them in a long-term monitoring programme.
- [- Establish a marine turtle biology centre in Tunisia.]

Turkey

- Reconsider tourist investment projects, ongoing or planned, concerning important marine turtle nesting beaches or their surroundings. Ensure that an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is made an integral part of the tourist and development projects connected with those beaches.
- Ensure the most important nesting beaches adequate legal protected status. Monitor the enforcement of the relevant regulations at the protected sites. Special priority should be given to the nesting sites of *Chelonia mydas*.
- Regulate activities related to tourist use that affects the important nesting beaches' value as nesting grounds, in particular: the use of speed boats and jet-skis; night visiting of beaches; lighting of beaches; riding and driving on beaches.
- Take all appropriate measures to prevent illegal sand extraction from the important nesting beaches.
- Create and enforce specific regulations for the reduction of by-catch and fishery-related mortality in bottom trawl and small coastal fisheries in the benthic feeding

grounds of the Bay of Iskenderun.

- *Reduce nest predation by applying appropriate techniques. In particular, the use of cages is recommended.*
- *Establish public awareness campaigns targeted at decision-makers.*