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MEDITERRANEAN ACTION PLAN

Meeting of the Bureau of the Contracting Parties to the
Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean
Sea against Pollution and its Protocols

Nicosia, Cyprus, 3-5 May 2001

PROVISIONAL AGENDA

1. Opening of the meeting
2. Adoption of the Provisional Agenda and organization of work
3. Activities since the last Meeting of the Bureau (Damascus, 31 October – 1 November 2000) :
 - Progress Report by the Coordinator and discussion on ongoing activities
4. Date and place of the next meeting of the Bureau
5. Any other business
6. Closure of the meeting

(The report of the meeting will be prepared in Athens and send for comments to the rapporteur and other members).

Working timetable

Thursday, 3 May:

08:30-10:30 Opening session
10:30-11:00 Coffee break
11:00-13:00 Working session 1
13:00-15:00 Lunch break
15:00-17:00 Working session 2
Evening: Official dinner

Friday, 4 May:

08:30-10:30 Working session 3
10:30-11:00 Coffee break
11:00-13:00 Working session 4
13:00-13:30 Closing session
Afternoon: Walk around old Nicosia
Evening: Dinner at Cyprus Taverna

Saturday, 5 May:

Morning: Visit to Akamas Reserve

The Akamas Peninsula

The Akamas region is the last extensive coastal area in Cyprus which includes extensive near virgin habitats and vegetation communities. Its flora is rich and varied. In spring it provides a spectacle of breathtaking beauty with colours and shapes long lost in most of the rest of the island; a reminder of the island's original identity. Its coastline is still largely pristine and diverse varying from surf swept beaches and cliffs on the west coast to calm azure crystal clear waters fringing a similarly diverse coastline on the north coast. Its marine life little impacted by the advance of civilization. Green and Loggerhead turtles still nest on its beaches and the occasional Monk Seal is still sighted there. The diversity of wildlife in this area ranks it as an area of outstanding ecological importance, not only for Cyprus but for the whole of the Mediterranean.

The Akamas range of hills reaches about 670 metres in height. The geology of the area and its morphology are varied, forming a complex mosaic which results in a multitude of habitats. Large parts of it are upper or lower pillow lavas and metabasalts. Diabase intrusions are found in these areas while areas of serpentinite fringe much of this ophiolitic complex. There are large parts of Akamas with sedimentary rocks, such as reef limestones, especially in parts of the north and southern slopes of the range. The limestone parts of Akamas, in several areas, are clearly reminiscent of the Kyrenia mountains with pine trees, junipers and with a profuse display of cyclamen (*Cyclamen persicum*) in spring practically reaching the sea. The autumn-flowering Cyprus endemic cyclamen (*Cyclamen cypricum*) is also found in Akamas further inland. Impressive sea cliffs and spectacular gorges are characteristic of the area. Rock formations, in the so called Mamonnia formations around the highest peaks of Akamas. Here lichen-covered gigantic rocks dominate stark and spectacular landscapes.

The vegetation of most of Akamas is characteristic of the Mediterranean shrub forests known as Maquis, consisting mainly of evergreen shrubs and small trees such as junipers, lentiscs and wild olive, with a variety of rock-roses and other bushes with, in places, a thin cover of pine trees. Drought (and goat) resistant forests. The Akamas peninsula is characterised by a large diversity of vegetation communities which are directly related to the area's very complex and varied geology and morphology. Man's influence on the vegetation of the area is minimal in the forest areas at least, though no doubt the original vegetation even in the forest areas was more lush. The fauna was also undoubtedly richer. Lack of water and the inaccessibility of the area spared it of the fate of most of the coastline of the island where agriculture and urban and tourism development have left little of the natural vegetation. Nonetheless forest fires, old and relatively recent, military exercises and goats have had their toll.

The rich vegetation of Akamas includes many endemic species of plants. Many other species found here are rare in most of the rest of the island. Over 30 species of endemic plants grow on the peninsula. Of these *Alyssum akamasicum* and *Centurea akamantis* bear the name of Akamas and are found nowhere else on the island except, locally, in Akamas. The endemic Cyprus tulip, *Tulipa cypria*, is found only in Akamas and near Turkish-occupied Myrtou.. Out of the 50 or so orchids of Cyprus about half can be found in Akamas. The area abounds with a variety of bee-orchids including the newly described endemic *Ophrys lapethica*. Ancient junipers, some centuries old, grow in much of the area, growing into sizable trees in areas with deep soils, as at Fontana Amorosa. In areas with higher humidity Strawberry trees (*Arbuto andracne* and the much rarer *A. unedo*), oleanders and myrtle can be found.

The gorges of Akamas, of exceptional ecological importance, cut deep into the chalk and the reef limestone areas, often forming high vertical cliffs and caves. Rare and sensitive vegetation communities have evolved here. On their inaccessible cliffs rare plants find

protection from grazing while many species of birds and other animals take refuge and breed on them.

The fauna of Akamas, is also rich and varied and the threats to it cause concern. As is to be expected from an area that is practically virgin and extensive it contains practically the whole spectrum of the Cypriot mammalian (and other) fauna with the exception of the mouflon. Species such as the endemic Cyprus White-toothed Shrew (*Crocidura cypria*), hedgehogs, hares and foxes can be found here. Several species of bats including the fruit bat, which has Cyprus as its northern limit of distribution, shelter in caves in the area.

The diversity in the habitats and in the flora of the area and the fact that insecticides are little used there, have resulted in an exceptional diversity in the insect fauna of Akamas. Numerous butterflies, some very rare, can be found in the area. Butterflies such as the Paphos Blue (*Glaucopsyche Paphos*), the Cyprus Meadow Brown (*Maniola cypricola*) the Cyprus Grayling (*Hiporchia pellucida cypriensis*) are on the wing from early spring. Mention must also be made of the very rare and spectacular Two-tailed Pasha, *Charaxes jasius*, which is dependant probably on the handful of *Arbuto unedo* trees found in this area. Similarly the Cyprus endemic variety of the Eastern festoon, *Zerynthia cerisyi cypria*, a fairly rare butterfly is dependant on the exotic looking Dutchman's Pipe (*Aristolochia sempervirens*) which is found in the gorges of Akamas.

There are several small springs and seepages in the area. Some, like the Baths of Aphrodite and Ayios Kononas and the elusive Fontana Amorosa, are well known. These springs and seepages, are precious for the survival of the fauna of the area especially in the long hot summer of Cyprus. Most springs have their own freshwater fauna and flora: small snails (*Melanopsis praemorsa* and *Theodoxus anatolicus*), a freshwater crab (*Potamon Potamios*), The freshwater crab which still survives here has disappeared from many parts of Cyprus as a result of the extensive use of DDT and other insecticides during the campaign against malaria.

On the sand dunes of the west coast of Akamas rare and endangered plants and plant communities as well as animals still survive. Species such as the spectacular Sand Daffodil (*Pancratium maritimum*) and the sand dwelling Spiny-footed Lizard (*Acanthodactylus schreiberi*).

On some of the beaches adjoining these sand dune areas lives the ghost crab (*Ocypode cursor*), an endangered species which has disappeared from many of our tourist beaches. This is now a protected species under the Fisheries Legislation, along with terrapins, sea turtles, dolphins and seals.

On the west coasts of Akamas, on the surf swept beaches of Lara and Toxeftra, Green and Loggerhead turtles nest. The Green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) is the rarer in the Mediterranean with a population of less than 500 females, is now in imminent danger of extinction in this sea. In the Mediterranean it now breeds mainly in Cyprus and on some beaches in Turkey. The sea turtles arrive here from various parts of the Mediterranean to lay their eggs. They nest in summer, from the beginning of June to the end of August. They nest every 14 days, laying 3-5 clutches of eggs in the season. Each time they lay about 100 eggs. They hatch some seven weeks later.

In the past Green turtles used to breed on other beaches in Cyprus also. These are now well-known tourist beaches.

The Department of Fisheries started a project in 1976 aiming at the conservation of the turtles that breed in Cyprus. In addition to other measures, a station and a hatchery were set up at Lara in 1978. The project aims, *inter alia*, at increasing recruitment of young turtles

into the population. This is achieved through the protection of turtle nests from various dangers such as predation by foxes and inundation by the sea. Up to 80% of the eggs laid on the beaches of Cyprus are either eaten by foxes (as eggs or hatchlings) or perish by getting covered by the sea. Each year some 8,000 young Green and Loggerhead turtles now reach the sea from protected nests in the Lara/Toxeftra reserve area. Another 12,000 or so Loggerhead hatchlings reach the sea from protected nests in the nearby Chrysochou Bay, which is their main nesting area. The Lara/Toxeftra area has been protected since 1989, and has the status of a marine/coastal reserve under the Fisheries Legislation, with management regulations in place during the nesting and hatching season.

In order to effectively tackle existing and potential threats to the sustainability of the area the Akamas peninsula has been the subject of a detailed conservation management plan, financed by the European Union through METAP, which is implemented by the World Bank. The study aims at achieving the sustainable management of the area, that is, safeguarding its biodiversity and ecological integrity whilst securing a sustainable future for the area's population.