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MEDITERRANEAN ACTION PLAN

Meeting of Experts on the implementation of
the Action Plan for the conservation of
Mediterranean marine turtles adopted within MAP

Arta, Greece, 27-29 October 1998

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE ACTION PLAN FOR THE CONSERVATION OF MEDITERRANEAN MARINE TURTLES

INTRODUCTION

Following a recommendation made by the third meeting of the National Focal Points for SPAs (Tunis, 25-27 March 1996), the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention approved at their tenth Ordinary Meeting held in Tunis, 18-21 November 1997, the convening by SPA/RAC in 1998 of a meeting of experts on the implementation of the three action plans for the conservation of species adopted within the Mediterranean Action Plan.

With the aim to provide technical inputs to the meeting with regard to the Action Plan for the Conservation of Mediterranean Marine Turtles, SPA/RAC convened a working group of independent experts on the conservation of marine turtles in the Mediterranean. The group met in Tunis on 27 and 28 March 1998 and included, besides SPA/RAC staff, the following experts: Mr. Mohamed N. BRADAI (INSTM, Tunisia), Mr. Andreas DEMETROPOULOS (MANRE, Cyprus), Mr. Guido GEROSA (CHELON, Italy), Mr. Luc LAURENT (BIOINSIGHT, France), Mr. Dimitris MARGARITOULIS (STPS-Greece), Mr. Sedat V. YERLI (Hacettepe University, Turkey).

The present proposal of amendments to the Action Plan have been largely drafted during that meeting. A first draft have then been finalized by SPA/RAC after the meeting and circulated to the members of the group for further advice. The present version incorporate some further comments to the first draft received from the experts.

The proposed amendments concern all the sections of the Action Plan, with the exception of the one concerning the Co-ordination Structure, which was not dealt with by the working group.

AMENDMENTS TO THE ACTION PLAN FOR THE CONSERVATION OF MEDITERRANEAN MARINE TURTLES

The amended version of the Action Plan reproduced herebelow is submitted to the Meeting for discussion. The amendments with respect to the text adopted in 1989 are highlighted in **bold**.

ACTION PLAN FOR THE CONSERVATION OF MEDITERRANEAN MARINE TURTLES

INTRODUCTION

1. 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, 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.**
2. **There is evidence of important negative impact on the populations of Mediterranean marine turtles by human activities (particularly fisheries as regards the marine environment, and occupation or deterioration of the sandy shores as regards the terrestrial environment).**
3. Many important aspects of the **status**, biology and behaviour of marine turtles **remain** too poorly known to plan a complete management strategy for the conservation of these species **in the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, the information which has become available since the adoption of the Action Plan allows a revision of some of its provisions.** This Plan will be readjusted if necessary as **further** information becomes available.
4. Information from various sources is taken into account in this Action Plan. Coordinated programmes for scientific research (population dynamics, tagging, biology and physiology), public awareness campaigns, proposals for the management of nesting beaches, etc., can ensure the survival and help the reconstitution of populations of marine turtles.

5. An effective and durable protection of the Mediterranean marine turtles implies management of the Mediterranean as a whole, in cooperation with existing programmes and plans, in particular :
 - at international level : the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP); Fisheries Management Plans (FAO/GFCM); **Global Strategy for the Conservation of Marine Turtles (IUCN/SSC)**;
 - at national level : the plans established by the various countries.
6. The most serious threats to the turtles are :
 - **deterioration of their critical habitats, particularly nesting, feeding and wintering areas;**
 - **incidental or intentional capture in fisheries.**Both threats have to be taken account of in any plan for the conservation of marine turtles and appropriate protection measures proposed.
7. This Action Plan for the Conservation of Mediterranean Marine Turtles outlines objectives, priorities, **implementation measures in different fields and their coordination**. The different components of the Action Plan are mutually reinforcing and must be taken together to have the best chance of success.

OBJECTIVES

8. The objectives of this Action Plan are :
 - a. Protection, conservation and where possible enhancing of the populations of marine turtles in the Mediterranean. Special priority should be accorded to Chelonia mydas wherever appropriate.
 - b. **Appropriate management** of the marine turtle habitats including nesting, feeding, and wintering areas **and migration routes**.

PRIORITIES

9. The following general priorities are recommended :
 - protection and management of **known nesting, feeding (benthic and pelagic) and wintering areas and migration routes**;
 - banning of exploitation and minimization of incidental catches;
 - **identification of feeding and wintering areas and migration routes**;
 - investigation of new nesting areas;
 - more knowledge on the **biology** of the species, in particular aspects **related to its life cycle**.

10. The following priority actions are specified :

- a. for the protection and management of the species and their habitats :
 - development and implementation of legislation;
 - protection and **management** of nesting areas;
 - **management** of feeding and wintering areas;
 - minimization of the impact of fishing on marine turtles.
- b. for research and monitoring :
Knowledge needs to be improved concerning the following priority topics :
 - identification of marine turtle critical habitats ;
 - assessment of fisheries' interaction ;
 - population structure ;
 - population dynamics ;
 - development of management techniques (nest screening, relocation, etc.).
- c. for public awareness, information and education :
The general public has to be addressed and in particular - depending on specific conditions - the following target groups :
 - the local population and **visitors** to nesting areas;
 - fishermen;
 - **tourists**;
 - **schoolchildren and teachers.**

In order to satisfy the set of priorities :

- emphasis should be given to information media and in particular **electronic media** ;
- production of Mediterranean information material is considered useful ;
- emphasis should be given to national information campaigns.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

11. An adequate implementation of the measures recommended in this action plan will only be possible in the presence of an appropriate support by the Parties, particularly with regard to the provision of the necessary financial resources, through national financing programmes and the support for applications to donors for relevant projects.

A. PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT

With regard to management the following measures are recommended :

A.1 Legislation

12. The Contracting Parties that have not yet extended legal protection to the marine turtles should do so as soon as possible specially having regard to the relevant international conventions.
13. Each country should be encouraged to develop and implement the necessary legislation for the establishment and management of protected areas for marine turtles.

A.2 Protection and management of critical habitats

14. **Integrated management plans should be drafted for terrestrial and marine areas which encompass marine turtle critical habitats.**
15. **Measures and regulations aimed at protecting critical habitats, on land and at sea, should be developed and implemented. In the case of nesting beaches, such measures should be in relation to public access, use of vehicles, use of artificial lights, minimization of predation and inundation, etc.**
16. Information campaigns directed at local authorities, residents, **visitors, professionals and teachers** are **urgently needed**, in order to enlist their participation in the efforts for the conservation of marine turtles.

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

17. A reduction of bycatch and related mortality can be achieved by:
 - applying of appropriate fishing regulations concerning depth, season, gear, etc., especially in areas with a high concentration of turtles;
 - the modification of fishing gear and methods. For instance, the use of TED and modified hooks could be tried and, as appropriate, introduced in fishing practices;
 - education/training of fishermen to correctly haul, handle and release incidentally caught turtles.

18. **Consumption and deliberate killing of marine turtles should be eliminated by:**
- **designing and enforcing appropriate legislation;**
 - **carrying out campaigns among fishermen in order to urge them to release marine turtles caught incidentally and to participate in the information networks on turtles (report sightings of turtles, of tags, participation in tagging programmes, etc.);**
 - **carrying out campaigns for fishermen and local populations to facilitate the implementation of legislation to ban the consumption and sale/use of all products derived from marine turtles as well as to reduce mutilations and killings because of ignorance and/or prejudice.**

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

- 19.- All the countries that have **critical habitats** for marine turtles should make immediate efforts for the **adequate protection and management of the areas encompassing those habitats.**
20. An inventory of all the nesting areas all around the Mediterranean should be prepared urgently, for their inclusion in a network of protected areas for marine turtles. Such an inventory should include the known sites (protected **and/or** monitored) and should be regularly reviewed in the light of increased knowledge.
21. A network of marine and coastal protected areas throughout the Mediterranean should be created covering **known** areas for reproduction, feeding, migration and wintering of marine turtles.

A.5 Information, Education and Training

22. A public awareness programme **including special documentary information material** should be developed for fishermen, local population and tourists to help reduce the mortality rates of marine turtles, **to induce respect for nesting areas** and to promote the reporting of any useful information concerning sea turtles.
23. A widespread campaign for the protection of Mediterranean marine turtles should be carried out in order to sensitize the public and encourage it to support conservation measures.

24. Training programmes should be developed for countries that have no experts with specialized knowledge of turtles, or for managers of specially protected areas including nesting beaches for turtles.

B. RESEARCH AND MONITORING

B.1 Scientific Research

25. The development of research and exchange of information should cover all the priority fields for the conservation of marine turtle population **by using various methods such as surveys, tagging, data logging, satellite telemetry, genetics, on-board observers, modelling.**
26. For some countries, there is little or no information on nesting sites and size of population of marine turtles. These countries should be encouraged to undertake such research programmes.

B.2 Monitoring

27. All Contracting Parties should encourage **monitoring** programmes **aimed at gathering information on population status and trends. To this purpose important areas should be selected and follow a standardized methodology in order to allow statistical comparisons to be made.**

C. COORDINATION STRUCTURE

28. It is necessary to coordinate the Mediterranean activities envisaged in the Action Plan for marine turtles. It is considered that the Mediterranean Action Plan/Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas is the most appropriate existing mechanism for this coordination in cooperation with other bodies concerned.
29. The major function of the coordinating mechanism with regard to marine turtles would be to :
- collect and evaluate the data at Mediterranean level,
 - prepare inventories of existing and potential networks of protected areas for marine turtles,
 - contribute to the creation of a Mediterranean network of protected areas for marine turtles,
 - prepare a time-table of activities and financing proposals for the Contracting Parties meetings,
 - contribute to the dissemination and exchange of information,
 - assist and/or organize expert meetings on specific topics regarding marine turtles, as well training courses.

30. Complementary work carried out by other international bodies aiming at the same objectives should be encouraged, ensuring coordination and preventing possible overlapping.
31. The status of Mediterranean marine turtles and the content of this Action Plan for marine turtles should be reviewed whenever necessary.