



Document for information

**Update report on marine turtle conservation
in Zakynthos (Laganas Bay), Greece**

Report by the NGO

Strasbourg, 5 October 2005

*Document prepared by
MEDASSET (The Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles),
Marine Turtle Conservation in the Mediterranean*

Marine Turtle Conservation in the Mediterranean
**Short Report on Loggerhead Turtle (*Caretta caretta*) Conservation Monitoring in Zakynthos,
Greece**

Submitted to:
The 25th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Convention on the Conservation
of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention), and
The European Commission

Prepared by

MEDASSET
The Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles

3rd October 2005

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1. HISTORY

- In 1985, the founder of MEDASSET (The Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles) commenced drawing the attention of the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention to the plight of the sea turtles on their significant nesting beaches in Zakynthos. The initiative was taken over and carried on after 1988 by the newly formed MEDASSET, with yearly reports and recommendations, exerting pressure for change regarding the Zakynthos turtle nesting areas in Laganas Bay.
- In 1994, MEDASSET made a formal complaint to the European Union; case No. 4/4667SG(94)A/15702 against the Greek Government for its failure to apply National and International Law and Bern Convention Recommendations, concerning the preservation of sea turtles on Zakynthos. In particular the Council Directive 92/43/EEC 21st May 1992, on the Conservation of European Wildlife & Natural Habitats of which the European Community is a party. We have renewed the complaint each year.
- The annual complaints to the EC finally proved effective in 1998. The complaint to the EC had been put in abeyance in 1997. Then MEDASSET appealed to the EC Ombudsman, this eventually led to an “on the spot appraisal” by the DG XI, whose representative at the 18th Bern Meeting in 1998 announced the commencement of infringement procedures against Greece.
- In the year 2000 it was the first time in 14 years that Laganas Bay was not discussed at Strasbourg. The Case File was closed at the 22nd Bern Convention Meeting in 1999 subsequent to the EC initiative to take the Greek Government to the European Court of Justice for non-implementation of conservation legislation and EC Environmental Directives in Laganas Bay. The Presidential Decree providing the constitution for the Zakynthos National Marine Park (ZNMP) in Laganas Bay was signed immediately after the EC announced its action in December 1999 during the Convention Meeting.
- In this ground-breaking move by the EC, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) considered the Case on 12th July 2001. This was the first time that such action had been undertaken by the EC on behalf of the endangered sea turtles, and a significant step forward. The Court came to its decision after taking into consideration a report presented by the Greek Government, which stated, that they did not have enough time to fully implement their commitments. The Court also took into consideration reports from involved NGOs, like MEDASSET, ARCHELON and WWF Greece. Greece was asked to prove its concern for the protection of the sea turtles by deeds, through the implementation of the EC Environmental Directive and its own Presidential Decree.
- On the 31st January 2002, the ECJ delivered its judgment, declaring that Greece had failed to fulfill its obligations under Article 12(1)(b) and (d) of Directive 92/43/EEC, and was therefore ordered to take the necessary measures to comply with the judgment and pay court costs.
- Following the ECJ judgement in January 2002 and an on the spot inspection in August 2002, the EC announced they were not satisfied, and issued a further warning to the Greek government that unless progress was made in summer 2003 the Commission would revert to the ECJ asking for punitive financial penalties to be imposed.
- A European Commission Delegation, consisting entirely of Greeks, visited Laganas in September 2003 finding that “substantial progress had been made towards effective implementation of a system of strict protection for the sea turtles”. MEDASSET’s request for access to the Report was refused. Findings of this report entirely contradicted the facts in Zakynthos as reported in MEDASSET’s September 2003 report made available to the EC DG Environment and the Bern Convention.
- A European Parliament Petition Committee visited Laganas Bay from 7th – 9th November 2003 highlighting in their report (10.12.03) to the Commission that “It was clear from our visit, conversations and pictures seen, that the provisions of the EC Directive are not being complied with...” At the same time Greek Authorities issued a “short-term timetable for the adoption of the remaining actions” in order to comply with the Court Judgement of 30th January 2002.
- On 4th May 2004 MEDASSET appealed to the European Ombudsman regarding denial of access to the September 2003 European Commission Delegation’s findings after an on-the-spot assessment in Laganas Bay.

- EC officials visited both the outgoing and incoming Greek governments between 30th October 2003 and 11th May 2004 to discuss and follow-up Greece's non-implementation of EC Environmental Directives, including the case of Zakynthos.
- On 20th May 2004 the new government's Deputy Minister of Environment answered a question in the Greek Parliament regarding the ZNMP, stating: "EC and National programmes available for the environment are sufficient to cover the financial needs of the Park". He said: "the lack of money to pay ZNMP dues is mainly owing to the fact that the 'Environment' Operational Programme co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), functions at an extremely slow pace".
- In July 2004 two Green Party Members of the European Parliament (MEP) visited Greece in an attempt to persuade the Greek Authorities to take steps about Zakynthos. In August, following lobbying by MEDASSET, a written Parliamentary Question about Zakynthos was tabled by MEPs at the European Parliament.
- On 15th September 2004 the Greek government received a final written warning requesting an update regarding its position on compliance with the January 2002 ECJ ruling. The document referred to several complaints received from citizens and MEPs during summer 2004 for non-implementation of the ECJ judgment. Greece was given a deadline of 22nd September 2004 to update the Commission.

2. ZAKYNTHOS NATIONAL MARINE PARK (ZNMP) FROM 21ST SEPTEMBER 2004 TO 30TH SEPTEMBER 2005

October 2004

- On 15th October the European Commission sent Greece a final written warning ('reasoned opinion') urging the government to comply with the 2002 ruling within two months (15.12.04), after which the Commission may ask the Court to impose penalties.

November 2004

- On 23rd November 2004 a Seminar entitled: 'Protection of Sea Turtles in Greece: On the Implementation of the Habitats-Directive in Greece' was convened at the European Parliament in Brussels under the patronage of German Green Party MEP, Hiltrud Breyer. MEDASSET was invited as the main speaker and gave a PowerPoint presentation on the situation in Zakynthos. The EC DG Environment and the Greek Government declined to attend. Two Green Party MEPs attended and several officials including the 'Eurogroup' for Animal Welfare. The MEPs present committed themselves to bringing the issue into the wider European debate, and to exerting maximum pressure for change.
- Immediately following the Seminar, MEDASSET was invited to a meeting of the European Parliament (EP) Environmental Committee with Zakynthos on the Agenda. MEP Hiltrud Breyer and Greek MEP Dimitris Papdimoulis posed questions to the Committee about Greece's obligations under the Habitats Directives (EC) regarding Zakynthos, asking what measures were being taken by the Committee to ensure Greece met its obligations. The Committee replied that Greece's deadline to respond to the 'Reasoned Opinion' had not yet expired; and a reply was required before deciding on the next step. In December Breyer and Papadimoulis presented a written question to the EP about Management of EC 'Natura 2000' Protected Areas, including Zakynthos.

December 2004

- 1st December – the Greek government responded to the EC's 'Reasoned Opinion' saying that it would provide €90,000 towards the €300,000 debts of the non-functioning National Park Management Body, promising further funding and a new Management Agency 'soon'. It stated that despite the provisional non-operation of the NMPZ, Zakynthos local authorities were implementing the existing legal framework and adequately protecting the sea turtle; delineation of the 'winter wave' line which separates the beaches from private property and registration of land ownership essential to considerations of compensation to landowners within the Park was "nearly complete"; and that **most of the land around sea turtle nesting areas belongs to the State!**

- Following the above statement the European Commission came to the decision that before considering the follow-up of the ZNMP case, the 2005 nesting season should be taken into account. October 2005 was set as a deadline.
- On 31st December the dilapidated biological waste treatment plant on the hill above the nesting beaches close to Sekania, overflowed again and the beaches and Bay were awash with effluent. The Plant has been the subject of Public Health Department prosecutions over the last four years.

February 2005

- On 7th February an article was published in the London 'Times' entitled: "British tourists blamed for damage to turtles' haven" (see addendum no.2).
- Greek General Inspectors of Public Administration Office (GEDD) visited Zakynthos to investigate compliance with the ECJ Judgment. Their damning 13-page report (09.03.05) contained a huge list of measures to be taken in order to comply with the ECJ ruling and with Greek law.
- The Director of the Land Registry on Zakynthos was hospitalised having been violently assaulted soon after signing official documents that confirmed the State owned most of the land around the nesting areas and predicting that 10 years of Court cases would follow as squatters on government property contested the findings.

March 2005

- At a press conference on 30th March the ZNMP President Prof. Ioannis Pantis announced that he had recently delivered an extrajudicial document to the Ministry of the Environment (MoE) warning that unless action was taken immediately to rectify the situation that has left Park workers unpaid since autumn 2003, the Management Body would sue the Ministry.

April 2005

- In response to a MoE statement, on 5th April 2005 a Press Release was circulated by the ZNMP Management Body. It outlined the 'half truths' of the Minister's words, and that moneys owed by the government since funding ceased in 2003, amounted to a colossal €12,425,71! This figure excludes unpaid matched funds for European-funded projects!
- On 14th April MEDASSET and a representative of the EURONATURE NGO, personally delivered a 17,000 signature petition and an open letter addressed to the Greek Prime Minister, to his secretary. Of the 17,000 international signatures only 4,000 were from Greece. It took two months and a follow-up signature campaign for the government's political and unsatisfactory response to arrive on 13th June 2005.
- 30th April brought the first charter flights to Zakynthos and the onslaught of the tourist season. For the first time since charter flights began and despite considerable discounts on package deals (many tourists arrived from the UK having paid only €150 for flight and a week's accommodation!), this year Zakynthos saw a drop in tourist arrivals of over 3%. Previous years had seen dramatic rises of between 5% and 14%!
- On 18th April, thirteen months after the ZNMP had been closed down, the Minister of the Environment got round to appointing a new President of the ZNMP Committee, then on 25th of May was forced to ask for his resignation after NGOs revealed that his family had vested interests (illegal building on Daphne nesting Beach) in the core area of the National Park!

June 2005

- Half way through the nesting season, on 10th June, the Minister of Environment nominated a replacement President for the Park – Professor Amalia Karagounis-Kyrtos, asking her "to impose law and order". She began her task with the list of ECJ demands. All work carried out by the new President has been done alone, as the Ministry has so far failed to appoint a Management Body to assist her nor allocated enough funds.

- MEDASSET has done its best to assist and update the new President, with its 23 year experience of the situation, by providing historic documents and introducing her to the many problems faced in Zakynthos.
- On 17th June it was reported in the local press that the Zakynthos Planning Authority could not deal with the flood of reports of illegal buildings on the 'strictly protected' nesting beach at Daphne!
- On 22nd June 2005 a negative reply was received from the European Ombudsman about MEDASSET's appeal regarding non-access to the September 2003 European Commission on-the-spot Assessment and the case was closed, despite an appeal by the MEP Hiltrud Breyer to strengthen the cause.

July 2005

- In a local press release (26.07.05), the new President of the ZNMP said that she considered Daphne to be a "lost cause", referring to walls built 10-15 metres from the sea as "anti-nesting obstructions". She said that "the picture there is one of environmental barbarity and abuse of legal order."

August 2005

- On 20th August with less than two months to go before the October 2005 EC deadline, as the bulk of tourists left Zakynthos, having disrupted yet another crucial nesting season, the newly appointed President made moves to meet the ECJ rulings. With unprecedented government support for her position and just enough money to pay part of the wages owing to guards and ZNMP staff since 2003, the following changes were made throughout the Bay (excluding Daphne beach): five guards were posted on the protected beaches (between 25 and 30 guards are needed for the ZNMP to function properly); information signs, kiosks and barriers preventing vehicle access were restored; a port police post was established in Laganas Bay at Agios Sostis to patrol the Bay, and a boat from Katakolo in the Peloponnese was brought in temporarily to patrol the sea; most buoys delineating restricted areas were replaced; and on some beaches excess furniture was removed, although much mysteriously found its way back the following day!

By the time these changes took effect nesting was over and although hatching goes on until October, tourist numbers by September were a fraction of what they had been between June and August.

September 2005

- Throughout the month of September a bitter debate raged between the Park's new President and the Head of the Local Zakynthos Administration (Prefect) regarding the illegal buildings and tourist infrastructure on Daphne nesting beach. Eleven years after the Greek government ordered the buildings pulled down, and despite having recently signed the demolition order himself, the Prefect claimed in the local press that it is not his job to do so, that the responsibility lies with the Government. His role is "not one of destruction", he said, but to protect the local inhabitants and foster the development and promotion of Zakynthos. He suggested that to solve the problem the State should compensate those affected by conservation measures. "We are here to protect interests of local people in Daphne and those of the Greek State", he said, apparently forgetting that it was the laws of the Greek State that he was being asked to enforce! The Prefect's position on demolitions changed over time. In the beginning he claimed in the Press that the responsibility was not his, then that he did not have the money to carry them out, he then claimed that he did not have the bulldozers! But the President of the Park pointed out that: "Compensation to landowners should not be confused with demolitions of illegal structures."
- Meanwhile, at the Greek Constitutional Court (07.09.05), Daphne landowners lost an appeal to remove restrictions (imposed by the Presidential Decree establishing the ZNMP) on private property development within the boundaries of the Park.
- **"The Turtles are being chased out of Daphne beach...the residents [there] are completely destroying their own land [they have] no sense of self esteem and a poor standard of living**

prevails”, said the ZNMP President in a frank and wide-ranging interview (21.09.05) with a local newspaper. Prof Karagounis also said that an appeal had been made to the European Commission for an extension of the October deadline, but a fine *could not be avoided*. All her efforts were aimed at reducing the size of the fine, which will be catastrophic for Zakynthos. The situation that prevails is ‘manmade of the local administration’s and the local people’s making’. She challenged landlords of the illegal buildings in Daphne to come forward with official proof of land ownership in order to claim for State compensation. “We never intended to close down the beaches,” she said in response to local claims, “but there are some rules which have to be followed when the turtles are nesting and this will be done next year if I continue as President.”

- The ZNMP President is optimistic of receiving the 60,000 Euro, which has been owed to the Park since 2003 by the Mayor of Laganas and the Prefect of Zakynthos, for their share of a LIFE/Nature EC project. She also hopes to take funds, as of next summer, for beach furniture rental tenders, and with this money run a self-financing Park. But can it be done without government funding?
- Since May 2005 €190,000 has been provided, barely covering guard and staff back wages and old running expenses of the Park.
- On 28th September a Management Body for the ZNMP was established according to the regulations outlined in the Park’s Management Plan.
- In 2005 MEPs have posed both oral and written questions about Zakynthos to the European Parliament (eight in total) and three questions have been asked in the Greek national Parliament.

3. THE LAND

3.1 East Laganas and Kalamaki 2005

May 2005 – 19th August 2005

1. The sand dunes of E. Laganas and Kalamaki have been accumulating garbage since they were last cleaned in 2003. They were not cleaned throughout 2004 and 2005 nesting/hatching season (not even after the August measures).
2. Stock cars and beach buggies raced along the nesting beaches throughout winter 2004 up to June 2005, turning the beaches into hard packed roadways. Throughout the tourist season vehicles including motorbikes buggies, and bicycles drove along the beach during the night with lights on, leaving deep ruts in the sand and frightening turtles from nesting.
3. In late July 340 umbrellas and 680 sun beds and dozens of pedal boats covered the beaches, more than double the number permitted by the ZNMP Presidential Decree (150 umbrellas and 300 sun beds). None were removed or stacked at night (see photographs) except those belonging to the Crystal Bay Hotel.
4. During the winter an old illegal wall on Kalamaki beach collapsed covering the beach with large rocks and making it impossible for turtles to nest. The situation remained unchanged after the 20th August.
5. This summer for the first time 5 new boardwalks connected the illegal ‘Kalamaki Beach’ taverna with the sand dunes that were bulldozed in order to accommodate more illegal beach furniture, obstructing the turtles from nesting (see photographs). These remained after 20th August.
6. Horse riding in groups of 3-8 riders thrived on the sand dunes bordering the beaches, although this stopped after August 20th.
7. Following the bulldozing of sand dunes in 2001 to accommodate more illegal summer furniture at the back of Kalamaki nesting beach erosion is taking its toll. A geological study of the situation is urgently required (see photograph).
8. Human interference and pressure on Kalamaki beaches were such that in Summer 2005 nesting was only possible on 1/3 of the beaches.

After 19th August 2005

9. On 20.08.05 new guards were posted in the area and information stations were restored at the entrances of the nesting beaches.
10. Barriers to prevent vehicle access to the nesting beaches were restored.
11. Park information signs were restored.
12. Excess summer furniture on the beaches was removed and confiscated and illegal furniture operators were prosecuted. However, local businessmen had been warned prior to the inspections so they removed most of the furniture beforehand only to replace it the following day! Ten days later excess furniture was again removed by the ZNMP. By this time tourism was declining, so furniture operators did not attempt to replace it.

3.2 Gerakas 2005

May 2005 – 19th August 2005

1. On 21.08.05 large groups of tourists were seen digging out clay from the rock face of Gerakas cliffs to use for 'spa treatments', As a consequence, the cliff face collapsed three times with rocks the size of cars ending up on the beach (see photographs).
2. Throughout the summer of 2005 there were approximately 110 umbrellas and 220 sun beds on the nesting beach, almost double the number permitted. These also remained at night. The Presidential Decree constituting the ZNMP allows 60 umbrellas and 120 sun beds (see photograph).

After 19th August 2005

3. An information station and a sign were posted at the entrance of the beach on 21st August. Regular guarding from 10am-6pm started on 27th.
4. Barriers to prevent vehicle access to the beach were erected on 23rd.
5. After striking a deal with the ZNMP President, on 1st September furniture operators started wearing NMZ T/Shirts but **no beach furniture at all** was removed from the nesting beach, remaining double the amount permitted by the Presidential Decree.
6. On 29th August the clay-cliffs were cordoned off, to keep people away and warning signs in two languages were erected by the ZNMP a couple of days later.
7. Wooden steps dug into the sand leading to the nesting beach, although cordoned off by the ZNMP on 2nd September, were still being used (see photograph).

3.3 Daphne 2005

The measures imposed by the new Park President from 19th August, had no affect on Daphne Beach. No measures were taken as it remains a no-go area for anyone working for turtle conservation.

1. Illegal tavernas, 'rooms to let', bars etc operated until late at night throughout the nesting/hatching season.
2. A new illegal building (constructed by D Vitsos, a Zakynthos Municipal Councillor – see attached article 'Turtles lose to Tourism', Athens News, 02.09.05) whose illegal construction was stopped and reported by the General Inspectors of Public Administration during their visit to Daphne in February 2005, was complete and in use.
3. Since Summer 2004 more illegal makeshift walls have been built parallel to the sea, preventing turtles from nesting (see photographs).
4. The 'strictly protected' sea turtle nesting beach in Daphne is also a car park with cars stretching down to the sand and wooden pergolas to keep them cool! (See photograph.)
5. Recreational beach furniture, completely banned in Daphne by law, covered the beach and flattened sand dunes. Over 200 umbrellas and 400 sun beds were seen in August of 2005 on Daphne's 250m beach, representing big increases from summer 2004.

6. There were further fires, which police and fire brigades reported as arson, on the hills above the nesting beach (the most recent on 04.08.05). In the past fires have resulted in severe erosion on the hills resulting in run-off of sediment onto the nesting beach.
7. More alien species of tropical plants were introduced; lawn and rock gardens covered the rear part of the beach where turtles used to nest (see photographs).
8. Rubbish and debris caused extreme pollution on the beach and marine area.
9. A large section of the beach was strewn with rubble from illegal walls built last year and destroyed by wind and waves during the winter, thus making it impossible for turtles to nest there.
10. Several boardwalks stretched from the back of the beach down to the sea, obstructing sea turtles from nesting.

Daphne is absolutely at the mercy of its landowners and of their whims, making nesting almost impossible for the turtles on this ‘strictly protected’ nesting beach.

3.4 Sekania 2005

This extremely important beach (under 600m) continued to be well protected thanks to WWF Greece, who are the owners of the land behind the beach and who, at their own expense, employed a guard throughout the 2005 nesting season.

3.5 Marathonisi islet 2005

Dozens of large and small sightseeing boats, moored near the shore and unloaded hundreds of tourists onto the nesting beach (in breach of the Presidential Decree) throughout the 2005 nesting season.

4. THE SEA

May – 19th August

1. Until mid August when the conservation measures of the new Park President started to take effect, boats of all kinds, including large yachts used the prohibited areas of the Bay, especially at weekends, some mooring for days and brightly lit during the nights.
2. Private and commercial boats far exceeded the permitted 6-knot speed limit throughout the restricted zones of the Bay.
3. Out of the five stranded turtles found dead on Laganas beaches in the summer, two had injuries from propellers.
4. Tourists complained (in writing) to the local English language press about the impact on turtles of too many “turtle watching” boats “chasing” basking turtles. They said that up to 6 boats at a time surrounded one turtle (preventing them from resting in between nesting) and people dived from boats to “ride the turtle” in the sea!
5. There were no buoys delineating the restricted area boundaries in the sea.
6. Huge sightseeing vessels, up to 30m long, loaded and unloaded hundreds of tourists each day on East Laganas beaches.
7. The patrol boat of the Port Authorities that should have patrolled the Bay was rarely seen, allegedly due to engine problems. There was no compliance with boat regulations in the Bay!
8. There was no Port Police post to observe and police infringements at sea.
9. Pollution in the Bay and near the shore in the form of “white foam”, oil and raw sewage was evident. The Mayor of Laganas complained (local press 21/07/05) about this uncontrolled issue, blaming the discharges on the dozens of small and large sightseeing boats and private yachts that operated and moored in the Bay.

After 19th August 2005

10. A Port Police post was set-up in the small port of St. Sostis in Laganas Bay to observe and police infringements.

11. A Patrol Boat was temporarily sent from Katakolo in the Peloponnese, by the Ministry of Merchant Marine to patrol the sea, however boats have still occasionally been seen exceeding the 6 knot speed limit in the Bay.
12. Buoys (donated by Hellenic Oceanographic Institute) delineating the restricted area boundaries in the sea, were replaced in most sectors of the Bay on 20th August.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- The situation on Laganas nesting beaches and in the sea was appalling, and as predicted by MEDASSET in our 2004 report, much worse than in the summer of 2004. Zakynthos is a good example of what can happen to an important “protected” biotope when the State does not care, (turtles don’t vote!), local landowners do not get compensated for development restrictions on “their” land, tour operators ignore conservation rules and facts, and the EC prevaricates and tries to compromise.
- If only Greece had shown the same support and ingenuity for the application of environmental protection as it shows for avoiding its responsibilities and penalties for non-compliance, the whole subject of protection of the marine turtles of Zakynthos would have been sorted out two decades ago.
- It is obvious that Greece will not act unless under extreme financial pressure. If the European Commission does not act by taking the case back to the European Court of Justice where a fine can be imposed then there may be no future for the sea turtles of Laganas Bay.
- **Political will, funding, local support and a capable Management Body are the key.**

6. T-PVS LIST

Environmental situation and technical reports presented by medasset to the standing committee to the convention on the conservation of european Wildlife and natural habitats (bern convention) at the council of europe, published under t-pvs reference:

ZAKYNTHOS (GREECE)

Updated reports prepared from 1984 and published as T-PVS since 1993:

- T-PVS (93) 32: L. Venizelos, MEDASSET: Marine Turtle Conservation in Zakynthos, Laganas Bay, Greece, 5 July-16 August 1993, 10 pages.
- T-PVS (95) 63: MEDASSET (*L.Venizelos*): Specific Sites, *Caretta caretta*, in Laganas Bay, Zakynthos (Greece), 3 pages. (*Follow-up report and recommendations*).
- T-PVS (96) 86: MEDASSET (*L.Venizelos*): *Caretta caretta* in Laganas Bay, Zakynthos (Greece), 5 pages. (*Follow-up report and recommendations*).
- T-PVS (97) 46: L. Venizelos, MEDASSET Marine Turtle Conservation in Zakynthos (Laganas Bay), Greece, 5 pages. (*Follow-up report and recommendations*).
- T-PVS (98) 48: MEDASSET: Specific Sites, Marine Turtle Conservation in Zakynthos Laganas Bay, Greece, 10 pages. (*Update report and recommendations*).
- T-PVS (99) 70: MEDASSET: Specific Site, *Caretta caretta* in Zakynthos (Laganas Bay, Greece), pp. 2-14. (*Update report and recommendations*).
- T-PVS (2000) 58: MEDASSET: *Caretta caretta* in Zakynthos (Greece), 8 pages. (*Update report and recommendations*).
- T-PVS (2001) 71: MEDASSET: Update Report on Marine Turtle Conservation in Zakynthos (Laganas Bay) Greece, 19 pages.
- T-PVS/Files (2002) 15: MEDASSET: Update Report on Marine Turtle Conservation in Zakynthos, Laganas Bay (Greece), 21 pages.
- T-PVS/Files (2003) 13: MEDASSET. Update Report on Marine Turtle Conservation in Zakynthos (Laganas Bay), Greece. 19 pages
- T-PVS/Files (2004) 10: MEDASSET. Update Report on Marine Turtle Conservation in Zakynthos (Laganas Bay), Greece. 22 pages



Photo 1: *Zakynthos Summer 2005:* The "strictly protected" sea turtle nesting beach in **Daphne** is also a car park! © 2005 MEDASSET



Photo 2: *Zakynthos July 2005:* **Daphne** "strictly protected" nesting beach covered in lawn, tropical plants and beach furniture: Made "cosy" for tourists but not for sea turtles who come here to nest. © 2005 MEDASSET



Photo 3: *Zakynthos Summer 2005:* Along **Daphne** "strictly protected" nesting beach several newly built walls parallel to the sea, and summer beach furniture (not removed at night) prevent sea turtles from nesting. © 2005 MEDASSET



Photo 4: *Zakynthos Summer 2005:* tropical plants, a wall and summer beach furniture, parallel to the sea along **Daphne** "strictly protected" sea turtle nesting beach, make nesting impossible. © 2005 Medasset



Photo 5: *Zakynthos Summer 2005:* wooden planks, a wall made of rocks along the beach parallel to the sea, summer beach furniture and rubble strewn across the beach from last year's collapsed walls prevent sea turtles from nesting on "strictly protected" **Daphne** beach. © 2005 Medasset



Photo 6: *Zakynthos August 2005:* every day hundreds of tourists dig out the clay from the rock face of the cliff (to use for 'spa' treatments), above the 'protected' nesting beach of Gerakas. as a consequence, the cliff face has collapsed three times with rocks the size of cars ending up on the beach. © 2005 MEDASSET



Photo 8: *Zakynthos Summer 2005:* two sea turtle nests protected by "cages" behind hundreds of pieces of recreational beach furniture on "protected" gerakas nesting beach. there is almost triple the amount of furniture permitted by law and it is not removed at night from this important beach, making sea turtle nesting very difficult. © 2005 MEDASSET



Photo 7: *Zakynthos September 2005:* steps dug into the sand at the back of the 'protected' nesting beach in Gerakas © 2005 MEDASSET



Photo 10: *Zakynthos Summer 2005:* sea turtle Kalamaki nesting beach are covered with peddlers, beach furniture and a wall; making it almost impossible for turtles to nest. © 2005 MEDASSET



Photo 9: *Zakynthos September 2005:* early evening, a wall of pedal boats obstructs hatchlings from reaching the sea on Kalamaki protected nesting beach. © 2005 MEDASSET

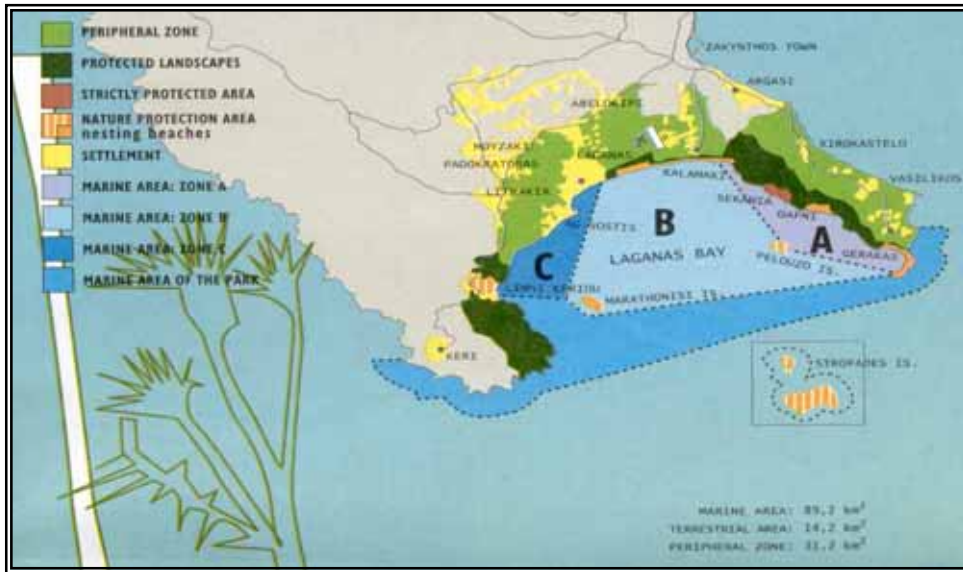


Photo 11: Zakynthos National Marine Park Map (source: ZNMP)



Photo 12: *Zakynthos Summer 2005*: following the bulldozing of sand dunes in 2001 to accommodate more illegal summer furniture at the back of Kalamaki nesting beach, erosion is taking its toll.

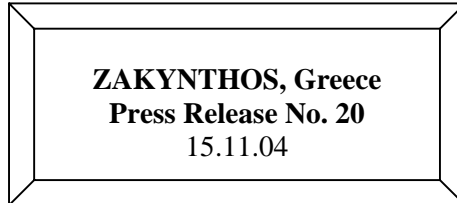


Photo 13: *Zakynthos Summer 2005*: in Winter 2004 an old illegal wall on kalamaki collapsed, covering the nesting beach with large rocks and making it impossible for turtles to nest. this situation remains unchanged.

8. ADDENDA

8.1 Press Releases

ADDENDUM 1.



GREEK GOVERNMENT ON THE ROPES!

Arising from a Reasoned Opinion from the European Commission (EC) to the Greek government on the subject of the Sea Turtles in Zakynthos, the English language “Athens News” published an interesting article on 5-11-04 by Cordelia Madden. The article covers the inadequacy of government response to the appalling situation on the nesting beaches of Laganas Bay, and to the pressure of international opinion embodied in an ultimatum from EC Environment Commissioner Margot Wallstrom.

In the face of Zakynthos National Marine Park (ZNMP) debts of around 200.000 Euros, the government have offered 90.000 Euros, not even enough to pay the outstanding backlog of wages.

The Reasoned Opinion is the final step before reverting to the European Court of Justice for punitive financial penalties against Greece.

The full article can be seen at:

http://www.athensnews.gr/athweb/nathens.print_unique?e=C&f=13103&m=A08&aa=2&eid=5

MEDASSET

ADDENDUM 2.



ZAKYNTHOS SEA TURTLES AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

A Seminar “Protection of Sea Turtles” at the European Parliament (EP) in Brussels on 23rd November 2004 considered the implementation of the European Commission’s (EC) Habitats Directive in Greece. The Seminar was under the patronage of German Green Party Member EP (MEP) Mrs. Hiltrud Breyer. MEDASSET was invited as the main speaker. The NGO “EURONATUR”, TUI Environmental Travel Group, MEPs, coordinators of the Green Group’s Environment Committee, were present.

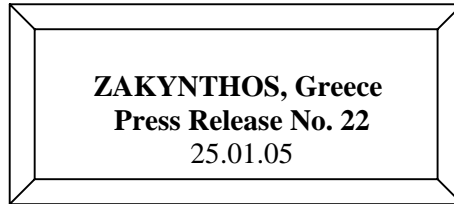
Representatives of the EC Commission for the Environment and of the Greek Government declined to attend offering somewhat flimsy pretexts, a point not lost upon the MEPs present who after a lively discussion during which the appalling situation in Zakynthos was highlighted, committed themselves to bring this important international issue into the wider European debate, and to exert maximum pressure for change.

A meeting of the EP Environment Committee followed the seminar with the subject of Zakynthos on the Agenda. EMP Hiltrud Breyer posed a question to the European Commission: “What concrete measures are the EC currently taking to ensure that Greece meets its obligations under the Habitats Directive, particularly regarding the sea turtles *Caretta caretta* of Zakynthos?” The EC merely re-stated their position and pointed out that the deadline for a Greek government reply to the EC “Reasoned Opinion” had not yet expired, and that they needed a reply before deciding on their next step.

Mrs. Breyer and Greek EMP Dimitris Papadimoulis replied that the matter of the Zakynthos sea turtles would be a “test” of the commitment and impartiality of the newly appointed EC Commissioner for the Environment who happens to be Greek.

MEDASSET

ADDENDUM 3.



**ZAKYNTHOS NATIONAL MARINE PARK:
NOW YOU SEE IT, NOW YOU DON'T"!**

The Greek government has written to the EC in response to a "Reasoned Opinion" from the EC (Final step before taking a case to the European Court of Justice) that gave 15th December as a reply deadline.

It says that it is going to provide 90,000 Euros to the currently non existent National Park Management Agency, towards its 300,000 Euro debts, and that it would provide further funding "soon". A new Management Agency would "soon" be established and a management plan would be prepared and submitted for approval.

It records that in the total mayhem on the nesting beaches publicly acknowledged by WWF, ARCHELON and Greenpeace, the authorities pursued (just) 20 cases against law infringement in Summer 2004.

It said that delineation of the "winter wave" line that separates the beaches from private property, and registration of land ownership, essential to considerations of compensation to landowners within the Park, was "nearly complete", and that this so far indicates that most of the lands around sea turtle nesting areas belong to the State!

What it did not say was that the lady Director of the Land Registry on Zakynthos, responsible for application of the above government investigation, was badly beaten up and hospitalised after signing the resulting official documents. She had previously predicted that 10 years of Court cases would follow, as squatters on government property contest the findings.

The predictable message that new ec environment commissioner Giorgos Dimas, who is Greek, gave to a specially convened meeting of greek environmental ngos, was that he is not in favour of taking cases to the european court of justice, saying that lobbying and persistence would eventually bring the desired solutions. when it was pointed out to him that 22 years of what he was suggesting had had little effect on zakynthos, he stated that he was opening an office in brussels and that everyone was welcome to visit him personally there to work together to try to find solutions.

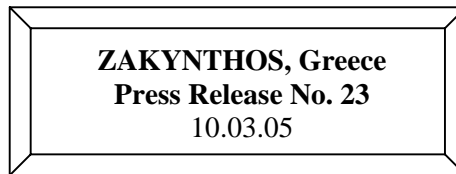
He also mentioned the 90,000 euro saying that the environment minister had showed him it would be paid by January 15th 2005. as of 25th of January it has not been received into the park bank account.

Recently the obsolete biological waste treatment Plant on the hill above the nesting beaches close to Sekania, the most important loggerhead nesting beach in the Mediterranean, has overflowed, and the beaches and Bay are awash with the effluent. The sea is turned black and dead for 1,500 square metres. God knows what will happen when the 500,000 holidaymakers arrive in a few months time and add their waste to the overburdened, overflowing plant! As for the sea turtles.....

An illustrated article about the effluent spillage which appeared in the zakynthos newspaper "Zante newz", is available in pdf format at http://tofino.ex.ac.uk/euroturtle/medas/pdf/zante_newspaper.pdf

MEDASSET

ADDENDUM 4



PETITION: 17,000 WORLD CITIZENS VOICE THEIR DISTRESS...

With both the nesting period for sea turtles and the tourist season due to begin in Laganas Bay in about 7 weeks, EURONATUR and MEDASSET have jointly delivered their 17,000 signature petition to the Greek Prime Minister, expressing intense concern and indignation, not only about the future of the National Marine Park of Zakynthos (NMPZ), but also about the other 26 EC “Natura 2000” Protected Areas in Greece. **“Sir, we today deliver to you the distress of 17,000 citizens from all over the world regarding the lack of protection for Biodiversity in Greece.”**

During the summer of 2004 the ecological destruction in Laganas Bay, the main nesting area of the endangered loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*) in the Mediterranean, was enormous. Illegality prevailed in the chaos of mass tourism, with pollution of the Bay, illegal construction, and motor vehicles driven along the nesting beaches day and night. It is obvious that if for the second year no effective measures for protection and management of the nesting beaches are implemented, the appalling situation will continue.

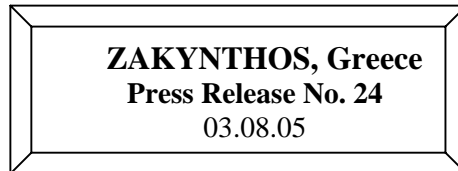
While the imposition of heavy fine from the European Court of Justice “knocks at the gates”, the Ministry of Environment (MoE), even at this last moment, remains indifferent to the management of the NMPZ, failing to provide financial support to enable the Park to achieve its objectives. The MoE lacks the essential political will to meet its national, international and EC obligations, and responds to pleas, calls and warnings with mere unfulfilled promises.

The full text of the letter accompanying the signatures can be found at <http://tofino.ex.ac.uk/euroturtle/medas/priminister.htm>

For photographs please contact MEDASSET

MEDASSET

ADDENDUM 5.



**Zakynthos National Marine Park: What Park?
Forget the Turtles: Save Greece from a European Court of Justice (ECJ) fine!**

- It is nearly five years since Greece lost the ECJ case on sea turtle protection in Zakynthos.
- Almost ten months since the then EC Environment Commissioner Margot Wallstrom sent an official "Reasoned Opinion" to the Greek Government (Final step before reverting to the ECJ).
- Five months since officials from the Greek General Inspectors of Public Administration Office (GEDD) visited Zakynthos to investigate compliance with the ECJ Decision. Their damning 13-page report contained a huge list of steps needed in order to comply with the ECJ judgement and with Greek Law.
- Eight months since the newly appointed Greek EC Commissioner of the Environment, Mr Stavros Dimas, advised lobbying and persistence to bring the desired solutions, although 22 years of what he was suggesting had little effect on Zakynthos!
- Thirteen months after the closing down of the ZNMP, the Minister of the Environment got round to appointing a new President of the NMP Committee then was forced to ask for his resignation after NGO's revealed that his family had vested interests (illegal building on the nesting beach) in the core area of the National Park! A replacement was appointed on 18-06-05.
- This year Euro MP's have asked eight Parliamentary Questions about Zakynthos. The German Green Party held a Seminar on Zakynthos at the Euro Parliament, and Intergroup on the Welfare and Conservation of Animals also got actively involved. Several parliamentary questions have been asked in the Greek Parliament. All these questions and many other enquiries received diplomatic and sometimes untruthful replies.

NOW, IN THE MIDDLE OF THE 2005 NESTING/HATCHING SEASON NO VESTIGES OF THE ZAKYNTHOS NATIONAL MARINE PARK (ZNMP) REMAIN.

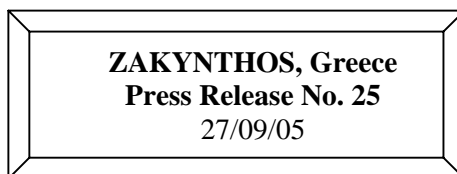
- Beach guards from the 2003 season and ZNMP staff remain unpaid;
- Vehicles roam the nesting beaches throughout the night unhindered;
- Nesting beaches are strewn with rocks and walls making nesting impossible;
- Beach furniture exceeds double the legal level;
- Nesting this year is almost impossible on Daphne "nesting beach" (Strictly protected), and very difficult in Kalamaki;
- Arson fires on the hills above nesting beaches.
- Speedboats drive wildly across Laganas Bay injuring turtles;
- Dunes are full of garbage and the sea is visibly polluted;
- Horse riders destroy the dunes and wooden walkways obstruct the beaches;
- Large yachts and tour boats anchor in the restricted areas and pollute the Bay;
- Car parking at beaches has been extended;
- New illegal building stopped by the GEDD Inspectors in Feb. 2005 has now been completed and is in use;
- Turtles harassed in the water by turtle watching boats and swimmers grabbing a ride;
- No policing of the Bay by the port police;
- No buoys at sea to designate restricted areas.

To sum up, there is absolutely no protection for the sea turtles being exercised by the government or by the local authorities.

In a local Press Release the new President of the ZNMP says she considers Daphne, a strictly protected nesting beach, to be a “lost cause”, referring to walls built 10 – 15 metres from the sea as “anti-nesting obstructions”. She said “the picture there is one of environmental barbarity and abuse of legal order”.

High definition photographs can be found at <http://tofino.ex.ac.uk/euroturtle/intranet/photos>

ADDENDUM 6.



**Zakynthos National Marine Park (ZNMP): Menacing Multi Million Fine Works Wonders!
As the tourist season winds down, beach protection begins!**

Backed into a corner, Greece has been forced to clean up its act before the European Commission's October deadline, or face the European Court of Justice (ECJ) and the imposition of a multi-million Euro fine for neglecting its commitments to the turtle nesting beaches of Laganas Bay (Zakynthos).

With less than two months to go before the deadline, as the bulk of tourists left the island having disrupted yet another crucial nesting season for the endangered Loggerhead sea turtles, Mrs Amalia Karagounis, the recently government-appointed President of the ZNMP, started to show her mettle. With unprecedented government support for her position and just enough money to pay part of the wages owing to guards and ZNMP staff since 2003, she used her considerable skill to enforce almost all of the ECJ ruling's demands throughout the Bay (excluding the 'strictly protected' Daphne beach): daytime guards were posted on a number of beaches; information signs, kiosks and barriers preventing vehicle access were restored; illegal businesses were closed down; a port police post was established with regular patrols of the Bay, and a boat was brought in to patrol the sea; buoys delineating restricted areas were replaced; and on some beaches excess furniture was removed, although much mysteriously found its way back!

The President has now turned her attention to the illegal buildings and tourist infrastructure on Daphne beach. Since the beginning of September, a bitter debate has raged between Mrs Karagounis and the Head of the Local Zakynthos Administration (Prefect). Eleven years after the Greek government ordered the buildings pulled down, and despite having signed the demolition order himself, the Prefect claims that it is not his job to do so, that the responsibility lies with the Government. His role is "not one of destruction", he said, but to protect the local inhabitants and foster the development and promotion of Zakynthos. He has suggested that to solve the problem the State should compensate those affected by conservation measures. "We are here to protect interests of local people in Daphne and those of the Greek State", he said, apparently forgetting that it was the laws of the Greek State that he was being asked to enforce! The President of the Park responded, saying: "Compensation to landowners should not be confused with demolition." Meanwhile, at the Greek Constitutional Court (07-09-05), Daphne landowners lost an appeal to remove restrictions (imposed by the Presidential Decree establishing the ZNMP) on private property development within the boundaries of the Park.

The ZNMP President is optimistic of receiving the 60,000 Euro, which has been owed to the Park since 2003 by the Mayor of Laganas and the Prefect of Zakynthos, for their share of a LIFE/ Nature EC project. She also hopes to take funds, as of next summer, for beach furniture rental tenders, and with this money run a self-financing Park. But is this possible? In January 2005 300,000 Euro was needed to cover the Park's debts (a figure which will have increased considerably since then). Since March 2004 funds have been promised repeatedly by the Ministry of Environment, in the Press and in Parliament, but until now only 190,000 Euro has been paid, barely covering back taxes and wage bills.

The government has produced a fine smoke screen, by appointing a very capable President, but as she pointed out herself, although an appeal has been made to the European Commission for a stay of execution on the ECJ ruling, her achievements will not prevent Greece from being fined. One thing is quite clear: Greece does not act unless under extreme financial pressure! If only Greece had met its environmental protection obligations two decades ago then it would not be facing a hefty fine and the Sea Turtles of Laganas Bay, Zakynthos would face a brighter and more certain future!

High definition photographs can be found at http://tofino.ex.ac.uk/euroturtle/medas/press_photos

8.2 Newspaper Articles (National and International Press)

ADDENDUM 7.

ATHENS NEWS , 05/11/2004, page: A08
Article code: C13103A082

A token sum won't save turtles

CORDELIA MADDEN

AFTER prevaricating all summer, the government has at last promised funding for the Zakynthos National Marine Park (ZNMP), which was forced to cease operations in May when the staff went on strike after not being paid for over eight months. The park was established in 1999 by the Greek state to provide protection for the endangered *Caretta caretta* sea turtles that for millennia have laid their eggs on the beaches of Laganas Bay.

Since May, illegal building and a proliferation of sunbeds, vehicles and other disturbances on the beaches have resulted in a situation so catastrophic for the remaining turtle population that European Commissioner for the Environment Margot Wallstrom sent the Greek government an ultimatum on October 16 warning that if nothing was done to protect the *Caretta caretta*, Greece would be taken to the European Court. Receiving no response from the government, on October 29 the European Commission sent a letter of reasoned opinion against Greece, the final step before a court case.

On October 27, the ministry of environment, public works and town planning - which is responsible for funding the ZNMP and another 27 park management authorities in Greece - approved a sum of 90,000 euros to get the park operational again. Although the government may hope this gesture will hold off the court case for a little longer, it will not go far towards saving the turtles.

"The money is not enough," Ioannis Pantis, president of the ZNMP, told the *Athens News* on November 1. He even expressed uncertainty as to whether the payment would be 90,000 euros or less, saying that the park's governing board will convene in the next few weeks after it has received the money to see how much was given and how much more is needed.

Lily Venizelos of the Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles (Medasset) says that 90,000 euros won't even cover the social security payments of the seven park staff (who haven't been paid since September 2003) and the 30 beach wardens (who have been unpaid for two months).

"It is estimated that 200,000 euros is required to pay outstanding salaries, wages, social security, tax and penalties for two years of non-payment," says Venizelos. "Even this amount would still leave the park without funds to operate."

She adds that the government also owes the park 300,000 euros for the restarting of the LIFE-Environment project [in which the EC provides half the money for an ecological programme, while the ministry of the environment of the country concerned donates the other 50 percent]; this money has been withheld since 2003, she notes.

"They are trying to avoid the European Court of Justice," Venizelos believes. "They gave this money just to give the impression that they are doing something. This is one of the most important nesting areas in the entire Mediterranean; it is of international importance and it seems the only country that doesn't understand that is Greece. The European Court of Justice is our only hope of saving the turtles," she continues. "Otherwise the *Caretta caretta* will slowly disappear from Zakynthos."

ADDENDUM 8.

The Guardian

Young British tourists threaten sea turtles

NICHOLAS WATT IN BRUSSELS
Wednesday December 15, 2004

British tourists, who wreak havoc across Mediterranean Europe every summer, are now threatening one of the world's most resilient creatures.

The loggerhead sea turtle, which has outlived dinosaurs, is at risk from members of Britain's youth who are wrecking one of its havens on the Greek island of Zakynthos.

The innocent turtles have, since time immemorial, laid their eggs on the island's Laganas beach every summer. In recent years, however, the beach has played host to a less attractive form of breeding when young Brits pour out of local bars in the early hours.

Alarmed by the noises emanating from the beach, terrified pregnant turtles have started laying their eggs at sea, which means they cannot be hatched. Any eggs laid on the beach face a hopeless future as hatchlings mistake neon signs for moonlight - which is meant to guide them into the sea - and die in the sand as they head towards the strip.

The issue has been taken up by the European Commission which has indicated this week that it is losing patience with the Greek authorities.

Stavros Dimas, the new environment commissioner who is Greek, is threatening to fine his countrymen for failing to comply with a European Court of Justice ruling three years ago. Mr Dimas recently issued a "reasoned opinion" which accused Greece of having "failed to fully comply" with the judgment. He took particular exception after a national marine park, which was meant to protect the turtles, was forced to close temporarily because of a lack of funds.

His findings came to light in answer to a written question from Chris Davies, the Liberal Democrat MEP for the North West of England.

Mr Davies said yesterday: "It's good that Dimas is getting tough. He's got an uphill battle to prove that he is serious about the environment ... but the EU moves slowly and unless we get action fast there will be no loggerhead turtles left to protect."

ADDENDUM 9.

The Times (UK) British tourists blamed for damage to turtles' haven

BY STEVE BIRD AND JOHN CARR IN ATHENS

February 07, 2005

FOR thousands of young British tourists, the white sandy beaches and turquoise waters of the Ionian island of Zakynthos are the perfect setting for revelry and holiday romance. Each summer the coastline is transformed into an adult playground as tourists hold late-night beach parties before dancing in the clubs and bars.

Their antics, though, are threatening the survival of the loggerhead turtle, which has, since time immemorial, relied on the once tranquil coastline to complete its rather more sedate breeding pattern.

Now the European Commission is taking the Greek Government to court for failing to protect the unique habitat from the 200,000 British holidaymakers who visit the island each year.

A month after his appointment, Stavros Dimas, the EU Environment Commissioner, has threatened to impose a hefty daily fine on his country for failing to safeguard the environment needed for the turtle, known as the *Caretta caretta*, to thrive. He is awaiting a full written response from Greece about what it will do to save the turtles' breeding grounds.

A European Court judgment three years ago condemned Greece for not protecting the breeding grounds, particularly at Zakynthos's Laganas Bay.

The noise from beach parties and nightclubs is preventing turtles from crawling on to the sands to bury their eggs. Instead, many are releasing their eggs in the sea, where they will not hatch.

Those that do venture on to the beach guarantee their offspring only limited odds of survival. Some eggs are smashed as the sand is churned up by beach buggies, dug into by children or pierced by spikes from parasols.

The hatchlings that emerge after nearly two months face further perils. Because the turtles rely on shimmering moonlight to guide their scamper to the sea, many are becoming disorientated by neon lights from nightlife and so head in the opposite direction, invariably to their deaths on busy roads.

So great was the concern for the survival of the species that the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) launched a campaign urging people to write to the Greek Prime Minister to express their concerns.

"A total of 11,000 e-mails were sent to the Greek Government," Dr Susan Lieberman, Director of Species at WWF, said. "We are delighted that the EU has taken such decisive action against the Greek Government and now hope this will force it to finally act to protect the habitat of these endangered turtles.

"It is simply not acceptable that beaches once protected for turtles are now the domain of sunbathers, swimmers and ice cream vendors." Environmental campaigners in Greece are less optimistic.

"The situation at this stage could not be worse," Lily Venizelos, president of the Mediterranean League for the Protection of Sea Turtles, said. She has been battling the political and tourism establishments for more than 20 years. The European Commission gave Greece a December deadline to answer charges that it was renegeing on a promise to spend €90,000 (£60,000) on a protected environmental park at Laganas Bay. "An answer was supposedly given," Vasilis Kouroutos, the league's secretary said, "but we never saw a draft. Even now we don't know what's in it. The Government gives us a thousand excuses and nothing else."

MARINE MIGRANTS

- Zakynthos is one of the last and most important nesting areas in the Mediterranean for the loggerhead turtle
- In summer up to 900 turtles lay eggs on the southern beaches of Laganas, Gerakas, Sekania, Dafni, Kalamaki and Marathonisi
- The male turtle never leaves the sea
- Females return to the same beach 30 years later. Only one in a thousand will reach the reproductive age of 30
- Loggerheads are highly migratory and make some of the longest journeys of all marine turtle species

ADDENDUM 10.

**ATHENS NEWS , 01/04/2005, page: A05
Article code: C13124A052**

Ministry faces legal action over turtles

CORDELIA MADDEN

THE MANAGEMENT body of the Zakynthos National Marine Park (ZNMP) is threatening legal action against the ministry of the environment, public works and urban planning for failure to meet its financial obligations to the park.

At a March 30 press conference, ZNMP chairman Ioannis Pantis announced the recent delivery to the ministry of an extrajudicial document warning that unless action is taken immediately to rectify the situation that has left park workers unpaid since autumn 2003, the management body will sue.

The ZNMP was set up in 2000 by the environment ministry following pressure from Europe to create a protected area for the endangered *Caretta caretta* turtle. Zakynthos is the last remaining Mediterranean stronghold of the loggerhead turtle, with females nesting on the island's beaches since antiquity.

The ministry is obliged to pay an annual sum of around 200,000 euros to the ZNMP to cover the costs of guarding these beaches from profiteers who build illegally or set up tourist activities on the sands. Since 2003, the ministry has not met this obligation, and in May 2004, after eight months without pay, the seven park staff and 30 beach wardens went on strike.

Throughout the all-important nesting season in summer 2004 the ministry did not fund the park, resulting in such catastrophic damage to the beaches that the Greek state received an ultimatum from then European commissioner for the environment Margot Wallstrom that unless something was done Greece would be taken to the European Court of Justice. The ministry's response was to promise 90,000 euros towards the park. This money, which would not even cover the social security payments of the staff, never materialised.

ADDENDUM 11.

ATHENS NEWS , 05/08/2005, page: A04
Article code: C13142A041

Eco-disaster looms on Zakynthos beaches

CORDELIA MADDEN

COINCIDING with the publication of a report by the recently appointed chairman of Zakynthos' National Marine Park (ZNMP), the Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles (Medasset) fired off an August 3 press release condemning the Greek government and the European Commission for allowing the key nesting areas of Zakynthos to become overdeveloped tourist playgrounds.

"In the middle of the 2005 nesting/hatching season, no vestiges of the ZNMP remain," writes Medasset founder and president Lily Venizelou. "Beach guards [...] and staff remain unpaid; beach furniture exceeds double the legal level; nesting beaches are strewn with rocks and walls, making nesting impossible; speedboats drive wildly across Laganas Bay injuring turtles; turtles are harassed in the water by turtle-watching boats and swimmers grabbing a ride."

Venizelou notes that five years have now passed since Greece lost a European Court of Justice case on sea turtle protection in Zakynthos, and ten months have elapsed since Greece was sent a letter of reasoned opinion (the final warning before once again being taken to the European Court) from the then European Environment Commissioner Margot Wallstrom. However, the situation has only deteriorated.

Caretta caretta, or loggerhead turtles have been laying their eggs on the beaches of Zakynthos' Laganas Bay since antiquity. The island's beaches are considered the last remaining Mediterranean stronghold of the endangered sea creatures. The ZNMP was established in 2000 by the environment ministry following pressure from Europe to create a protected area for the *Caretta caretta* turtle, but it swiftly fell into difficulties both through lack of funding from the ministry and through on-going battles with profit-hungry islanders who resented the park's existence as an obstacle to developing the picturesque bay for tourism purposes.

The park has been all-but unguarded since summer 2003. At a March 30 press conference, then ZNMP chairman Ioannis Pantis threatened legal action against the ministry of the environment, public works and urban planning for failure to meet its financial obligations to the park.

Pantis was replaced on June 18 by Amalia Karagouni-Kyrtsou. According to Medasset, before Karagouni-Kyrtsou's appointment the ministry of environment tried to install someone else in the post, before it was exposed by NGOs that this individual's family was involved in illegal construction on the nesting beaches.

Following her first visit to the island as ZNMP chairman, on July 26 Karagouni-Kyrtsou reported numerous infringements of protection legislation. Calling the strictly protected nesting beach of Daphne a "lost cause", she said the picture of Laganas Bay is one of "environmental barbarity and total abuse of the legal order strictly for monetary gain."

ADDENDUM 12.

**ATHENS NEWS , 02/09/2005, page: A04
Article code: C13146A041**

Turtles lose to tourism

The national marine park in Laganas could be attracting tourist. Instead, local objection to the park and short-term political expedience might cost the tax payers dear

MARIA KAGELIDOU

Greece has until October to prove to the European Union that it is protecting the caretta-caretta loggerhead turtle in Zakynthos if it hopes to avoid massive fines. But the reality on the ground suggests that no amount of corrective action between now and October will be enough. The national maritime park in Laganas Bay which is responsible for ensuring caretta caretta protection is battling a series of problems.

"Zakynthos and the Bay of Laganas is the most important nesting area for caretta caretta in the Mediterranean. We have the largest nesting density in Europe. Out of over 11 kilometres of beach the turtles used to nest in only 5.5 are still in a condition to attract turtles because of unchecked development" explains Kostas Grimanis of Archelon, the Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece which has been monitoring Zakynthos' nesting beaches since 1982.

In 2002 the court found that the country had failed to set up and implement an effective system to protect the turtle from disturbance during its nesting period and to ensure the preservation of its breeding sites. Last year the European Commission sent Greece a final warning that it will refer the case back to court unless measures are taken to comply with the judgement. In May this year, Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas said that his directorate's decision on whether Greece will be prosecuted again depends on what will happen during this year's breeding period which started in May and concludes in October.

Caretta caretta is the only sea turtle that nests in Greece. It can also be found in Crete and the Peloponnese. According to Archelon, nesting numbers range from 1700 to 4000 annually on the monitored beaches and overall in Greece from 2300 to 5000. These fluctuations mean that it is hard to establish what is happening with the species population in the area. To lay its eggs the sea turtle comes out of the water after sunset, digs a hole in the sand, deposits between 110 and 120 eggs and leaves them to hatch for 45-65 days.

Loud noise and strong lights from beach bars discourage and disorient the turtles. Should the turtle be deterred, it returns to the sea and tries to find another place to lay its eggs. After 2-3 attempts it aborts the eggs in the sea. Even when a nest is successfully laid, beach umbrellas thrust into the sand can destroy buried eggs. When turtles finally hatch, they are meant to find their way to the sea by moonlight. Artificial lights can confuse them.

Archelon estimates that only 1-2 hatchlings survive to adulthood.

Development has rendered a large part of the beach of Laganas Bay a no-go area for turtles. The section of the bay, known as Laganas Beach, features cars, mopeds and heavier bikes regularly driving on the beach in open defiance of a blanket prohibition, while umbrellas and sunbeds frequently remain on the beach even after seven in the evening.

The turtles have increasingly turned to Sekania, a section of Laganas Bay that remains properly protected by World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). "In 1994 we bought the beach to provide an unspoilt place for the turtles to lay their eggs even though private real estate purchases are against WWF policy normally. Now the beach, which is just under 600 metres long, hosts over half the nests in the Bay of Laganas," explains Harikleia Minotou, WWF's project manager on the island.

In 1999 the Greek government set up a national maritime park in the bay to protect the turtle and its breeding grounds. The park functioned adequately from 2000 till 2003, when its president resigned

under local pressure. The next president was appointed earlier this year, but was forced by the environment minister to resign when it was revealed that his wife owned illegal buildings **where?**.

Two years' wages were owed to the park's employees and the project began to fall apart. Under the threat of prohibitive fines the government last July appointed Amalia Karagouni Kyrtsou, a biology professor at the University of Athens, to head the park.

"Things are hard as my appointment came on the 13th hour and not the 11th. I am trying to see what is important as the park has very many responsibilities. We have made some important steps in guarding the beaches but there are difficulties. The financial situation is tragic," Karagouni tells the Athens News.

"There is a black whole of half a million euros. So far we have arranged for the employees to get some money, they have returned to work so the park is again functioning - albeit with shortcomings".

Part of the missing money was mis-spent. According to Karagouni even though the park did not have enough money to fulfil its obligations it spent around 15,000 euros for hospitality when Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomeos visited the island and made donations to the local sports club.

Central government and local authorities also owe the park money. Unless they pay up, Greece is likely to incur yet another fine. "We have received EU funding for some projects and spent it. But part of the deal was that the Greek authorities would part-fund the projects. They have yet to give the money over and if they fail to do so then we will have to pay at least 500,000 euros," says Karagouni, referring to the fact that the park must return EU funds it has already spent. "If [Greek authorities] pay off their obligations, we might receive an extra 135,000 euro from the EU," she says.

Lambros Kaldis, deputy-mayor of Laganas denies that his municipality owes the park any money. "When the application for funding was put through, we tried to help and said we would contribute to increase the EU funds the park would receive - but on the understanding that we wouldn't actually have to contribute," he told this newspaper. The apparent contradiction stems from the fact that the municipality had no intention of making a financial contribution - only of demonstrating that it would, in order to invite matching EU funds.

The court verdict

But the most urgent problem for the park president in view of a possible EU inspection is illegal development on Dafni beach. In 1994-1995 the local prefect signed an order to demolish 13 illegal structures on the beach, which has never been enforced. Meanwhile new structures have been popping up.

George Vitsos is a member of the municipal board of the town of Zakynthos. He recently built an illegal property on the beach.

"In the early 1980's the government put a stop to building and said they were going to come up with a plan for the area's development. Nothing has happened since. They should compensate us if they want to tear down our property or buy up our land. But no move has been made in this direction even though we have been asking them to come up with proposals," says Vitsos.

But Vitsos is unwilling to sell his land for environmental causes, because he believes they are a front for commercial exploitation. "Environmental groups have offered to buy up the land but I am not selling it to them so that in the future they can change its status and develop the land for their own purposes," he says. "They have already taken up one beach. There are interests in the ministry and elsewhere. Meanwhile, people continue to build on Laganas, the other town of the Bay, illegally. Why should they be allowed to continue to break the law and make money?" he protests.

Vitsos wants the park to be abolished and local authorities to assume the responsibility of protecting the turtles. "We have been living with them all our lives and protecting them. Previously the same people were saying, 'never mind the illegal structures'. Now they are all for demolishing them," he says, referring to the environment ministry in Athens. He believes that the ministry is paying lip service to the turtles' protection in order to avoid tan EU Court fine.

Vitsos' distrust of environmental groups is emblematic of a wide swath of popular opinion in the Bay. Environmental groups say locals have repeatedly attacked their members and volunteers and that Dafni is effectively off-limits to environmentalists.

Kladis thinks that local discontent is due to heavy-handedness by outsiders. "They did not take into account the local population, did not come to an understanding with them. It was either from the top up or members of NGOs telling people what to do."

He also says the park's non-payment of wages to its employees beginning in 2003 was a breaking point. "When the park first started functioning, everyone accepted it to a certain extent. But then it ceased operating, things on the ground deteriorated and it is now harder to get people back on track. At some point they were thinking of opening up park shops but the local entrepreneurs think this is taking over their livelihoods" Kaldis explains.

Everyone the *Athens News* spoke to seems to have given up on Laganas Beach, the worst-maintained area. "Laganas is a finished story," says Karagouni. But she has hopes for other parts of the bay. "Dafni is another story. The locals will not allow [improvement] but if the Greek state is forced to pay a fine, it should send bill to the inhabitants of Dafni." But she still supports the idea of compensating the locals for limiting the use of their land.

Essentially the problem boils down to whether the authorities, local and national, will manage to enforce the law. But Zakynthos is a winner-takes-all electoral region. Its single MP was elected by a majority of 41 votes in last year's elections. Even a handful of votes here could possibly call a national election. And with local elections looming in autumn of 2006, it seems unlikely that any candidate will risk upsetting his electoral clientele.