

Marine Turtle Conservation in the Mediterranean

**Update Report on Marine Turtle Conservation
in Zakynthos (Laganas Bay) Greece.**

**Report for the 20th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Convention on the
Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention)**

Report prepared by
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The Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles

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INTRODUCTION.

Once again, another sea turtle nesting season has passed in Laganas Bay, Zakynthos and MEDASSET who have since 1984 been pleading for protective measures on the beaches and in the seas of the bay can only report **that this season was worse than we have seen for several years.**

Constant lobbying and pressure applied by MEDASSET in the form of official complaints and detailed reports to the European Commission since 1993, have resulted in the Commission opening a case against Greece at the European Court of Justice, for lack of conformity with European environmental legislation. However **the destruction of the Laganas Bay nesting beaches continues unabated.**

At the 19th Meeting (29th Nov. - 3rd Dec. 1999) of the Standing Committee, the delegate of the European Commission informed the Committee that "the Commission had opened an infringement procedure against Greece in this file and the case was now at the European Court of Justice. European Structural Funds had been blocked in the area for lack of conformity with European legislation". The Committee decided that it had discussed this file enough in 14 meetings, closed the file and asked the European Commission to report on the result of the infringement procedure in the European Court of Justice.

The Secretariat Memorandum records that "after the debate was closed, the Committee received the information from the Greek delegation that the Presidential Decree for the establishment of the Zakynthos National Marine Park (ZNMP) has been signed by the Head of State, an information that was welcomed by the Committee".

This report was drafted in order to inform and update the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention at its 20th Meeting and the DG/ENVIRONMENT of the EC, concerning the prevailing situation in Laganas Bay.

THE ZAKYNTHOS NATIONAL MARINE PARK.

Since last December in Zakynthos, the Prefect, the Mayor and landowners are amongst the 27 Individuals who have taken recourse to the Greek Constitutional Court asking for the ZNMP Presidential Decree to be revoked.

The chaos prevailing on the sea turtle nesting beaches was reflected at the 28th July public meeting in Zakynthos, where the Deputy Minister of the Environment introduced the newly appointed Committee for the Management of the ZNMP. Anger erupted as local landowners **demanding compensation rather than alternative possibilities**, verbally abused the Ministry of the Environment. The Deputy Minister of the Environment explained that the Committee is provisional for 6 months and its main function is the collection and recording of

local objections to the provisions to make “certain necessary adaptations and changes” to the ZNMP Presidential Decree.

According to an interview in the national press (Kathimerini 08.09.00) by the Deputy Minister, a compromise with the Local Authorities promises that **those paragraphs of the Presidential Decree for the ZNMP, which “offend” the local people, will be amended by the end of the year.** Yet another attempt to water down the provisions for the Park? This had been clearly indicated in his address to the meeting in Zakynthos on 28th July 2000, during which he made **no mention of compensation payments**, concentrating solely on the benefits to accrue to Zakynthos through participation in EC environmental projects.

It has come to our notice that the Ministry of the Environment intends to present a compromise to the Zakynthians under which the illegal buildings will be removed, in return for the **lifting of development restrictions** within the area of maximum protection at Dafni. It is their ploy that the buildings would be rebuilt as so called “eco-friendly development” within the present protected area, using EU funds and at no cost to themselves. This would of course be illegal under current legislation.

It is clear that the government has **no intention** of even trying to establish the ZNMP as a fully operating protected National Park in the normal sense of the phrase as it is understood internationally, no intention of spending their own money, and **no intention** of doing anything positive to abate the environmental destruction in Zakynthos. **To them the political cost would be too high.**

The new provisional ZNMP Management Committee, less than two months from inception, has already spent 50% of its 50m. drachms (\$127,877) budget on its beach guard programme, which proved a **total failure**. Now it hardly has enough left to continue to exist, let alone set up its own infrastructure.

The Cadastral Plan of the area, defining land ownership and boundaries is **still incomplete**, and High Water Mark remains undefined (There are no tides in the Mediterranean, only storm wave effect). As a result, no compensation can be even considered for legal landowners.

CASE HISTORIES.

In order to provide an insight into the workings of the Greek Authorities and the Law as regards to issues involved in conservation in Laganas Bay and elsewhere in Greece, MEDASSET is including two specific case histories in this report.

Case history I: New illegal building on beachfront property in Dafni, belonging to Mr. Daskalakis.

In 1998 it was reported that a concrete slab was being installed on the western end of the beachfront at Dafni in zone “A” of absolute protection (Addendum 1 Map), without official permission. In 1999 this was furnished with a brushwood roof and commenced operation as a beachfront taverna. Nothing was done by the authorities, despite official complaints by MEDASSET and other environmentalists. This year the building has a tiled roof, and earthworks intended to “improve access to the beach” resulted in soil contamination on the shore completely altering the beach morphology. MEDASSET denounced this illegal operation to the Ministry of the Environment, the Local Authorities, the local Member of Parliament, and informed the EC, as it has for all illegal buildings in Laganas Bay since 1985 (**All of them still remain**).

The matter was referred to the Local Authority Planning Department, who carried out an investigation and on the 20th June this year, issued a document stating that the structure was built without a permit (illegal) and believed that the building was constructed at an illegal distance from the sea. They gave Mr. Daskalakis 30 days to come forward with evidence to the contrary, saying otherwise the building will be pulled down. The document went on to impose a 3,750,200 Drachms (\$9,591) fine subject to a 30% discount if Mr. Daskalakis confessed that the building was illegal, with a further annual fine while the building remained, of only 154,800 Drachms (\$396). It is very rare, due to political cost, for illegal buildings to be

pulled down in Greece, and as we have seen, **never** in Zakynthos! It would seem that a payment of a mere 154,800 Drachms (\$396) per year could well keep Mr. Daskalakis safe in his illegal business. Further, there are other laws in Greece which sanction ways in which an illegal building can become legal, for instance if electricity or telephones are installed. Needless to say that the building is still there, and we expect **will remain**.

Case history II: In June this year a new mobile cantina was parked on Dafni beach (“A” protection area) selling refreshments. This was referred through the same channels as Case I above, including both the Local Planning Department and the police. The Planning Department reported that they did not find the cantina, presumably for some reason it was not on the beach at the time they checked. However the Police checking the whole of Dafni beach found 3 restaurants and a cantina selling food without the required license and notified the Local Authority with a view to their **eventual** closure. The letter from the Chief of Police is dated 4th September, just before the end of the season when the tourist operations will close down anyway. No doubt they will open up again at the beginning of next season, and as has become usual, the whole lengthy process will start over again. The police have promised to keep a continual watch on Dafni beach, but all they can do is refer the matter to the Local Authority.

It is quite obvious that the “*laissez faire*” and “*toothless bulldog*” nature of attempts at implementation of environmental legislation in Greece, with such cumbersome and lengthy processes, is totally useless. **What hope is there that this or any other of Greece’s “Natura 2000” designated sites can be adequately protected?**

CONSERVATION.

- On 26th July 2000, two days prior to the Meeting to introduce the new Management Committee for the ZNMP, two passengers of a jet ski which was continually in use in the restricted protected area that day, **attacked volunteers** of the STPS/ARCHELON, after the President of MEDASSET and one of the volunteers had tried to explain politely that the use of jet skis and speed boats is not permitted within the sea area of the ZNMP. Blood was spilled on the beach in front of the destroyed ZNMP information signs (Photo 2). Three of the injured, two STPS volunteers and a German tourist who tried to help, **had to be taken to hospital** for examination and treatment. Dionysios Korfiatis has been identified and charged.
- In an addendum to T-PVS (98) 62, it is suggested that “the 15 years of nesting data gathered in Laganas Bay is not sufficient to draw any safe conclusions due to large annual fluctuations”. We note that the 1999 WWF/Greece Report on the Management of Sekania Beach, also highlights the **lack of nesting information**. Is there any possibility that funds could be found to collate and disseminate the existing 17 years of raw detailed data so that at least a start can be made towards its detailed analysis? All of the current nesting females on the beaches of Laganas were hatched **prior** to the start of record keeping, and any complacency engendered by average figures of current nesting would be unwise until current adolescent survival rates become more obvious. **In the meantime we should be alert for even the smallest sign of an adverse trend at any individual point on the nesting beaches.**

THE LAND.

- Thanks to 4 months of voluntary activity by an English conservationist, Daniel Caute, **5 tons of rubbish** has this summer been removed by hand from the nesting beaches, including plastic bottles, electric items, dead animals, reflective material, gas bottles, broken beach furniture etc. We hope that his activities have set an example to the local people and the authorities, rather than taken as an indication that they do not have to do it. There are no tides in Greece to wash the beaches twice each day.
- Until the middle of August, no guards were appointed by the local administration for the supervision of the nesting beaches at night, and then those who attempted to do their job

were largely inefficient and ineffective, being subject to harassment and intimidation, **denied access to the Dafni beach** and lacking necessary equipment.

- For most of the summer from 9am to 8pm, dozens of horse riders galloped over sea turtle nests along the three kilometres of beach from East Laganas to Kalamaki. **Jumping the horses over the turtle nest protective cages was a popular sport.** Since the end of August the venue has moved into the very valuable fragile sand dune ecosystem. There bunches of sand lillies (*Pancratium maritimus*), were seen being picked by children. One young tourist who was thrown and injured when her unsupervised horse bolted, received little or no sympathy from the local owner of the horses, and was taken to the hospital by bystanders. The owner was heard to remark, **“We Zakynthians must stick together”**, an attitude that permeates the whole scenario of Zakynthos.
- More **bulldozer work** on the dunes directly behind the Kalamaki nesting beach for the 5th consecutive year, to accommodate more beach furniture (photo 3), **has now destroyed the few remaining sand dunes** in that area, with the result that the nesting beach is now fully exposed to the glaring lights of the inland hotels. The E. Laganas dunes are the venue for motor scooter racing and hunting, and sand extraction continues unabated.
- The mystery of **why** the Laganas – Kalamaki road parallel to the beach was widened to 13 metres (T-PVS (99) 70), instead of the 3 metres sanctioned by the impact assessment, is said to be to provide a solid base for the construction of shops planned to be built along the road **where dunes were bulldozed and trees cut down.** The work was carried out using EU funds from the Delors package, indicating how easily EU funds can be subverted into other projects than those for which they were intended.
- In July and August **tourism figures rose again**, by 15% from 1999. Dozens of brand new hotels appear each year in Kalamaki village, bringing even more tourists on to the nesting beaches. Noise and light pollution from the hotels and discos increases.
- **Night and early morning flights have resumed 4 times a week** in order to meet the demands of the tour operators, just as MEDASSET predicted (T-PVS (99) 70).

In Kalamaki:

- ⇒ Hundreds of sun beds, umbrellas and other objects remain on the beach at night **obstructing nesting.** They now make a continuous, solid, 2 row obstacle from the illegal taverna belonging to the Kalamaki Beach Hotel past the Crystal Palace Hotel to the end of Kalamaki, near Vrondonero, (Photo 6). This part of the beach has reached saturation point this year, with visitors leaving the beach because they are unable to find space to sunbathe (Photo 5).
- ⇒ An illegal Cantina, noted in our 1999 report, on the sand dune at the top of the beach, was removed twice by the police, but returned each time and **remains there.**
- ⇒ The newly installed ZNMP station on the beach has had its umbrellas stolen and information leaflets in English ran out.
- ⇒ At 8 pm one evening in July a group of Italians **lit bonfires** on the unguarded beach.
- ⇒ More rocks from the crumbling wall have fallen on to the narrow beach **making nesting impossible**, and “castles” and holes built in the sand remain at night (Photo 4).

In Dafni:

- ⇒ Apart from the illegal building problems on pages 2 & 3, the beach is covered with hundreds of items of summer furniture and other obstacles that are not removed at night. **Seven beach furniture operators use the beach.**
- ⇒ **Speargun fishing** continues in this area.
- ⇒ **Part of the beach is now out of bounds due to instability of the cliffs**, weakened by lack of vegetation since the 1989 arson. There are no roots to bind the soil!
- ⇒ The rest of the **nesting beach is littered with stones** as a result of the bulldozing at the back of the beach to provide space for beach furniture, **and several wooden slatted ramps lead to the water.**

In Gerakas:

⇒ There are hundreds of items of beach furniture, which are not removed at night.

THE SEA.

- **Effluent seeping** from the biological garbage treatment unit situated in the area of Kavalos, above Vrononero, ends up with the swimmers in the sea of Kalamaki. A MEDASSET volunteer who dived there found to her horror that an area of the seabed 100 metres wide for 300 metres along the shore had been covered with a dense dark deposit. **No sign of sea life was found there.**
- The Plant was established in 1995/6 despite protests by all concerned NGOs in the area, with a life expectancy of 6 – 7 years. Due to the tourism boom it has now reached saturation point and leaks. Garbage lorries unloading at the plant attract **large numbers of sea gulls**, previously rare in the area, that **now pose a threat to the emerging sea turtle hatchlings**, before they can reach the sea.
- For most of the summer **the “protected” bay teemed with craft of all kinds, speeding and anchoring.** Dozens of yachts and sailing boats of all sizes moored and anchored all over the Bay including the islet of Marathonisi.
- **The special patrol boat** supplied in 1999 for the day to day policing of the waters of Laganas Bay **was not seen there until 17th August**, in spite of pleas to the port authorities by MEDASSET. After 17th August the regulations were enforced.
- **The number of dead turtles reported in the bay increased this year**, with 2 hit by boats, six found dead with no obvious cause, around the shores of E. Zakynthos, and tourists in a glass bottom boat, near Marathonisi, spotted one dead on the bottom of the sea **anchored by a rope to a concrete block**, with a hook and fishing line hanging from its mouth, killed by fishermen. 2 turtles injured by boats were taken to the STPS recuperation centre. It must be stressed that this can give little indication of the number **not** washed ashore. Speedboats criss-crossing the unpatrolled bay prior to 17th August obviously took their toll!
- Glass-bottom boat operators **on turtle watching trips disturb basking and resting turtles.** On making a sighting, the boats signal each other, and boats crowd around the poor harassed creature. The operators help each other to avoid the **“no sighting, your money back”** promise!
- On the islet of **Marathonisi**, more and more boats disembark tourists daily on to the small beach. 80 – 150 tourists are to be found there at any time of the day.
- **Fishing nets** to a length of 800-1000 metres were laid daily, 600 metres from the shores of the “protected” Bay during June, July and August. They were removed each evening at approx. 7 pm.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

1. Land ownership records (Cadastral plan) and delineation of the High Water Mark should be completed NOW! Arrangements for compensation to **LEGAL** landowners should be devised and committed as a matter of urgency. Without them the establishment of the ZNMP is impossible.
2. **The EC should withhold all forms of Community Aid for the Island of Zakynthos** until satisfactory tourist control and conservation measures are fully in place in conformity with the existing laws and ZNMP Presidential Decree, and enforced.
3. That the Greek Government ensure that **comprehensive data** regarding the use of Laganas Bay beaches by both turtles and tourists over the past 16 years **is made available** in the public domain. This will enable a realistic assessment of the

anthropogenic impact in the area, in order to both control tourism and optimise conservation.

4. **Make suitable eco-friendly arrangements for the now over-burdened garbage and sewage systems in Laganas Bay.**
5. It is of vital importance that whatever changes are made to the Presidential Decree for the ZNMP, **they should not in any way be allowed to reduce the protection** embodied in current legislation.

The above recommendations are not withstanding those detailed in the past 14 years that are still not implemented.

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 presented yearly since 1984:

T-PVS (93) 32: Marine Turtle Conservation in Zakynthos, Laganas Bay, Greece, 5 July-6 August 1993, 10 pages.

T-PVS (95) 63: Specific Sites, *Caretta caretta* in Laganas Bay, Zakynthos (Greece), follow-up report, 3 pages.

T-PVS (96) 86: *Caretta caretta* in Laganas Bay, Zakynthos (Greece), 5 pages.

T-PVS (97) 46: Marine Turtle Conservation in Zakynthos (Laganas Bay), Greece, follow-up report, 5 pages.

T-PVS (98) 48: Specific Sites, Marine Turtle Conservation in Zakynthos Laganas Bay, Greece, 10 pages.

T-PVS (99) 70: *Caretta caretta* in Zakynthos (Laganas Bay, Greece), update report, pp. 2-14.

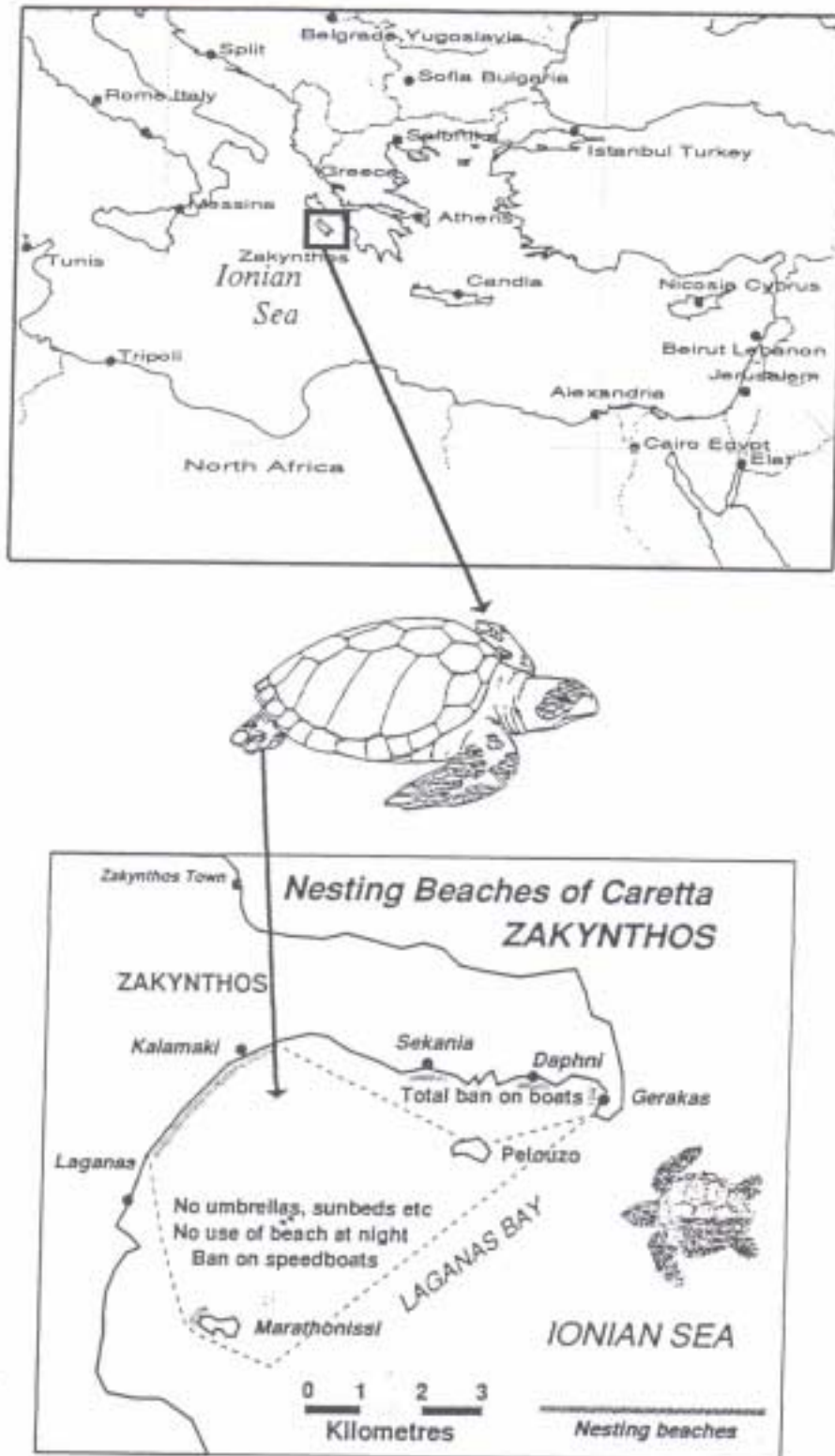
T-PVS under "Statement by delegations":

T-PVS (91) 4: Statement about Zakynthos, pp.16,17,30.

T-PVS (91) 80: Declaration on item 11.13 and intervention about Zakynthos, pp.21-25.

T-PVS (92) 83: Declaration of MEDASSET on item 12.1 about Zakynthos, pp.16-18.

ADDENDUM 1.





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Nest



Photo 2: E. Laganas. The only two turtle conservation and ZNMP signs, shot peppered and of poor quality, with the letters pulled off. These, next to a caged nest, are at the location of the assault.



Photo 3: Kalamaki. More bulldozed sand dunes at back of the nesting beach to accommodate beach furniture.



Photo 4: Kalamaki. Each year more rocks fall on to this narrow “protected” part of the nesting beach making nesting impossible.



Photo 5: Kalamaki. Wall, sand castles, pedaloos, beach furniture. Anarchy reigns on this once productive part of the “protected” turtle nesting beach, now denied to the turtles.



Photo 6: Kalamaki. The entire “Protected” beach in front of the Crystal Palace Hotel is now covered in summer furniture, so dense that tourists and turtles alike face difficulty finding a space.