

FOLLOW UP REPORT TO THE 17th MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE AND NATURAL HABITATS (BERN CONVENTION Dec. 1-5/1997), CONCERNING MARINE TURTLE CONSERVATION IN ZAKYNTHOS (LAGANAS BAY), GREECE.

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Developments since the 16th Meeting of the Convention, 2-6 December 1996.

It was in 1991, when the Greek State decided to proceed with the establishment of the National Marine Park of Zakynthos, which would help to sort out the important demands of private ownership, and precisely define the management and protection of the biotope of the Marine Turtles and of the local ecosystem.

The constitution of the Zakynthos National Marine Park (ZNMP) being the subject of recommendation No. 9 by the Standing Committee to the Greek State, which called for a special environmental study to define the management of ZNMP. This study has at last been completed in 1997, after a delay of 6 years. Following several tempestuous meetings with the local authorities of Zakynthos and much debate, the Greek Ministry of the Environment produced, in 1997, a draft Presidential Decree, which although environmentally satisfactory, leaves unsolved a number of very important issues, such as the question of compensation to the beachside legal landowners, land deals to be completed, and most importantly the delineation of the high water mark necessary to define the ZNMP boundaries.

The Ministry of the Environment then sent a copy of the draft Presidential Decree to the Zakynthos Local Authorities. The Local Authorities, in this case, including the Regional Council, the relevant Landowners Committees and the Local Administration, rejected the proposed Presidential Decree, and then, on 7th Sept. 1997 put forward their own different proposals. These local authority proposals called for a much larger scale of building development in Laganas Bay area, including the currently uninhabited islets of Marathonisi, which has an important Sea Turtle nesting beach, and Pelouso. This is delaying progress in the matter. One of the several reasons that the Presidential Decree proposals were rejected was that they did not give the local authority as much say in the management of the ZNMP as they would have liked.

From the 10th to the 12th October 1997, the Local Administration of Zakynthos organised the Fourth International Environmental Meeting supposedly under the aegis of the Ministry of the Environment, who when approached, disclaimed any connection and in fact did not send a representative.

The above actions of the Local Authority were carried out with the approval of the founder of the local environmental group ZOK, who has fought for turtle

conservation in Zakynthos since 1980, and who's office was bombed in 1985 because of his pro-conservation attitude. He has recently bought a tract of land in Daphne, adjoining the nesting beach "to protect the turtles", at a low price, but has since proposed that the law relating to housing density, near protected nesting beach, should be relaxed. This has come as a shock to conservationists in Greece, and caused a sensation in the Greek press.

There has already been a considerable loss of the ZNMP funding, offered in previous years by the European Union but not absorbed for the park, and continuing lack of progress and more delays will lose the second package.

Recommendation No. 9.(11-12-87) on the Protection of *Caretta caretta* in Laganas Bay.

Because this is the Tenth Anniversary of the Standing Committee recommendations to the Greek State, we will celebrate by reviewing them.

Recomm. No.1.

As elsewhere in the Laganas Bay nesting area, the 13 illegal buildings in Daphne remain untouched - no action has been taken to demolish them.

- Temporary compensation provided in 1995 and 1996 by the Ministry of the Environment, through the Local Administration of Zakynthos, to keep the owners from using the illegal buildings was not allocated in the summer of 1997. As a result the beach was completely uncontrollable.

- Permission was given for the operation of two refreshment stands on Daphne beach this summer, one authorised by the Local Authority, and the other by the Local Prefect with the blessing of the Ministry of the Environment. The illegal taverna in Daphne was one of these, and it had it's lights on late into the evening. When the police were informed by MEDASSET, they said that every time they went there, the lights had been turned off before they arrived.

Recomm. No. 2.

The walls and concrete platforms, on optimal turtle nesting sites in Kalamaki and Eastern Laganas, have not been removed.

Recomm. No. 3.

Acquisition of land for the ZNMP, now falls within the proposed park constitution.

- The land has not yet been defined, or ownership confirmed.

Recomm. No. 4.

Legal limits of all public land have not yet been set.

Recomm. No. 5.

The recommendation to ban and penalise the use of deck chairs, sunshades and pedalos on restricted nesting beaches of Gerakas, Kalamaki and, E. Laganas has not been implemented. On the contrary use of these items has multiplied dramatically. For example, on the 800 metres

long beach at Gerakas, an area of absolute protection, this summer (1997) there were along the nesting beach:-

- 136 sunshades
- 310 Sunbeds
- 16 pedalos
- 16 canoes.

all illegal, and all left overnight: An impenetrable barrier to nesting turtles. Another 100 private sun umbrellas were carried to the beach each day by the tourists, who, by 14:00 hrs. each day numbered between 750 and 900.

On Kalamaki nesting beach, a triple row, extending 500 metres along the beach consisted of:-

- 250 sun umbrellas
- 500 sunbeds

On the islet of Marathonisi, there were about 120 people per day, on its 200 metre nesting beach, which normally holds on average 130 nests per season. When tourists were told it was a nesting beach they replied "How can that be? There are no signs". A good question! At the restricted beach of Kalamaki, further areas of dunes have been flattened, to make room for even more sunbeds, chairs and umbrellas. 90% of Kalamaki beach this summer, was denied to the turtles by the beach furniture.

Recomm. No. 6.

Roads and vehicle tracks remain open, and mopeds, motor cycles, cars, horses and carts have free access to the beaches of Kalamaki and East Laganas. Some cars, but mainly motor bikes, were driven on the beaches by day and night, and horse riders, in groups of as many as ten at a time, rode along the beach trampling over nests. The presence of local community guards was almost non-existent.

Recomm. No. 7.

Lights from hotels, restaurants, etc. are still glaring on nesting beaches particularly at East Laganas and Kalamaki, disorientating hatchlings.

Recomm. No. 8.

Assessment of Laganas Bay as a Marine Park has been completed.

Recomm. No. 9.

Development of Kalamaki continues unabated, the sand dunes ecosystem is destroyed and 90% of the Kalamaki beach is now denied to turtles during the summer nesting period.

On the 24th March 1995, the decision of the Standing Committee regarding Laganas Bay, was adopted, with the words "concerned that the credibility of the convention is at stake".

The Sea.

The Harbourmaster claims that it is impossible to implement the sea regulations in Laganas Bay, due to the shortage of men at his disposal. The Port Authority Patrol Boat was seen patrolling in Laganas Bay four times in the month of July, and four during August. Repeated requests for more manpower by the Harbourmaster, and by MEDASSET to both the Ministry of Merchant Marine and to the Local Authorities have had no effect.

As a result sea regulations in Laganas Bay were not adequately enforced. Several private speed boats, yachts, boat loads of tourists, "turtle boats", jet skis and water skiers, frequented the Bay, anchoring, breaking the speed limit, some approaching and disturbing any sea turtles they could find. It was a case of "I'll show you a turtle or your money back".

MEDASSET reported 17 boats to the Port Authorities in July this year, but many boat identifications had been deliberately painted over and obscured to avoid being identified. A yellow catamaran boat, called "Angel Heart", was mooring in the bay and at Marathonisi regularly, and was far exceeding the speed limit. Some of the boats reported were fined.

Most tourists are unaware of the restrictions, but it is estimated that 70% of the boats in default are owned by Zakynthos residents, and only the remaining 30% by Italians and other visitors. In July MEDASSET observed approx. 70 boats each day speeding in the Bay and 10 yachts and smaller boats moored in the Bay each day. There are reports that local boat owners, when asked by environmentalists not to anchor in the bay, became abusive and even threatened violence.

Another problem in Laganas Bay, is that it is used by fire fighting planes for water supply to be used against the many forest fires, scooping up water indiscriminately, at times on a daily basis.

Turtle deaths.

Five dead turtles were found between June and September, washed ashore in the region of Laganas Bay. Three of these had definitely been killed by boat propellers, one was found to have been bleeding from every orifice but with no external damage, and it is suspected that it was a victim of Dynamite fishing operations.

Marathonisi.

Each day about 10 boats were illegally moored at Marathonisi. Fishing nets were deployed in front of the nesting beach, overnight from 8pm to 7am., thus obstructing the turtles. Unfortunately this is a sector of the bay where because it belongs to sector B protection, fishing activities are not restricted, perhaps they should be.

European Union.

Please refer to the enclosed copy of a letter which we sent to the Bern Convention Secretariat on May 12th 1997 regarding MEDASSET's complaint to the EU.

On the 13th June Commissioner Ritt Bjerregaard visited Athens, and NGOs were invited to frame questions for her. MEDASSET asked, and if we may, we would like to ask you the same question:-

“Do you not realise that unless something is done now, the famous delays and obfuscation of the Greek Government may lead to the situation where sometime next century we will have a beautiful conservation park for the sea turtles of Laganas Bay, but how unfortunate - **NO SEA TURTLES?** Or worse still an ecological desert in Laganas Bay not worth conserving, such as we have seen elsewhere in the Mediterranean.

ARE YOU ABLE TO DO ANYTHING TO AVERT THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TURTLE POPULATION OF ZAKYNTHOS?”

The response was that Commissioner Bjerregaard would write to us. Need we say that to date, four months later we have received no response from the Commissioner.

Interpretation of Nesting Figures.

It seems a common theme at the moment, and an argument used by the EU, that current variations in recorded nests of sea turtles in Zakynthos are within norms derived from past records, and to draw the conclusion that there is therefor no evidence for a declining population. I would like to draw your attention to the fact that, as sea turtles lose favoured nesting sites, they congregate in heavier numbers on the remaining, perhaps less favoured, nesting beaches.

The number of nests laid each season do normally fluctuate, and not only in Zakynthos, and such fluctuation is not necessarily indicative of anthropogenic impact on the breeding biotope. In other words low tourism - 800 nests, high tourism - 1200 nests, does not mean that high levels of tourism enhance turtle nesting!

In Zakynthos in particular, although protective measures are sluggish the few remaining pockets of important nesting, e.g. Sekania with 54% of the nesting in the entire Bay, crowded into 350 meters of beach is mainly responsible for sustaining overall numbers of nests. Such concentration of nesting in a small area, in cases where the future nesting density increases due to further loss and deterioration of other beaches in the bay, casts doubts on the viability of the whole turtle population of Zakynthos. (Over crowding resulting in the disturbance of each others nests, accidental damage to the beach, natural disasters, etc.).

This is precisely why all nesting beaches are of such vital importance.