

UPDATE REPORT ON MARINE TURTLE CONSERVATION IN ZAKYNTHOS (LAGANAS BAY), GREECE

Report to the 23rd Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention)

Prepared by
MEDASSET

The Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles

September 2003

INTRODUCTION.

In 1985, the founder of MEDASSET (The Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtle) 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 announced the commencement of infringement procedures.

Year 2000 was the first time in 14 years; Laganas Bay was not discussed at Strasbourg. The file was closed 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 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.

In this ground-breaking move by the EC, the European Court of Justice 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 simply did not have enough time to fully implement their commitment. The Court also took under 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 of January 2002, the European Court of Justice delivered its judgment, declaring that Greece had failed to fulfil its obligations under Article 12(1)(b) and (d) of Directive 92/43/EEC. The Court stipulated that by not implementing the required measures, the Hellenic Republic had failed to fulfil its obligations under Article 12 of the Directive, and was

therefore ordered to take the necessary measures to comply with the judgment and to pay the court costs.

After the European Court of Justice (ECJ) judgement against Greece on 31st January 2002, and an on the spot inspection in August 2002, the EC announced they were not satisfied with progress, and issued 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.

There has definitely been increased pressure on the Greek government to solve the problem, however they persist in a rhetoric of denial and political manoeuvring rather than implementation and enforcement.

At the present time the Greek government and the local MP are embarked on an attempt to persuade the EC that taking the case to its logical conclusion in the Court will somehow make the situation worse. What is certain is that as soon as the pressure is off, progress will stop. It is important to realise it has taken us nearly 20 years to get to this point!

ZAKYNTHOS NATIONAL MARINE PARK (ZNMP) FROM 21ST MAY 2003.

- 1) The ZNMP Management Agency has:
 - No legal teeth - Cannot impose fines, only report and complain to the authorities.
 - No certain funding - has to continuously beg Government in order to pay staff and other costs.
 - No Long Term Management Plan: The Presidential Decree (PD) that constitutes the Park is very restricted on certain issues, certain gaps in Decree do not authorise ZNMP Agency management rights. Proposed changes to the PD were only made in order to appease local demands, nothing else. **Until new PD is made public their effect on conservation in Laganas Bay cannot be assessed.**
 - The ZNMP's 3 year Management Plan is required by Article 9 of the PD "in order to reach the goal and aims of the ZNMP". The PD goes on to describe it as the "Operational and Management Regulations of the ZNMP, to be drafted, as foreseen by Article 18, para. No. 5 n. 1650/86 covering all protection, operational, financial and organizational aspects of the work of the Park, and be approved by the Minister of Environment within 6 months of the constitution of the Park". **Three years later this is still not in place to set long term priorities for conservation, and rules.**
 - The Park claims to have an annual "Management Plan" for 2003, but we have not seen this, and it was not available on their website. Presumably they refer to the "Annual Action Plan, where the directions, definitions, procedures, actions and the budget are presented in specific financial and chronological terms" also referred to in Article 9. "These documents include a list of priorities and interventions, allocation of financial resources, and the estimate of the budget for secondary projects and expenses and a budget for any related project".
- 2) Prof. Pantis position as President of ZNMP expired in July 2003 and the Minister of the Environment renewed his appointment until changes to the Presidential Decree are published. This decision has still to be published in the Government Gazette before it becomes official.
- 3) Between 1st June and 26th July the ZNMP made 9 complaints to the various authorities about infringements, 2 were successful and **one moved the horse-riding to the top of the beach**. The ZNMP reports that they have made a number of successful direct interventions regarding lights and shop operation regulations.
- 4) In Laganas Bay illegal construction and other activities continue. e.g. opening roads, and property improvements as seen in Daphne, destroying dunes in Kalamaki, etc. This

continues despite complaints by ZNMP and NGOs to the local Court or to appropriate authorities. No one tries to stop these. **Reports and complaints are the only action taken, which are mostly too late, when illegal activity has already progressed or has been completed.**

- 5) According to the Press, on 14/7/03, the Deputy Minister of Environment, aware of the situation, embargoed the issue of any building permit for the whole of Laganas Bay for a period of six months until January 2003 **so there is now no officially permitted building activity around the Bay.**
- 6) Information on ZNMP LIFE 2001-2004 EC project was only on the projects website for 2001. No information for 2002 progress, so we asked the Park Authority to provide some information on hard copy.
- 7) An International Conference 18 - 21st May "Applying EU Environmental Legislation in the Field of Marine and Coastal Protection", supported by DG/ENV, the ZNMP, ECOLOGIC etc, was well attended by the Local Administration, **but by less than 10 local public!**
- 8) Compared to Summer 2002, tourism was up 4.3% in Summer 2003, but of very poor quality. The police force on the Island was reinforced by an extra 50 men to cope with an escalating drugs and theft problem in Laganas. Conflicts between Club/ Bar operators and Hotel operators arising from police action after local complaints about the noise at night preventing people sleeping, ended in spilt blood and prison sentences.
- 9) The Orthodox Christian Ecumenical Patriarch visited Zakynthos 22 – 25 August 2003 to inaugurate the new site for the ZNMP Agency premises provided by the Bishop of Zakynthos, and he also visited the Strofadi Islets that are part of the Park.
- 10) As at the first week in July, 28 wardens and supervisors were employed by the Park, and there were 7 warden huts, one at the Louis Zante Beach Hotel (East Kalamaki), four in Kalamaki at Louros, Pastras, Stani, Crystal Palace Hotel Beach, one in Gerakas, and one on the islet of Marathonisi (Fig. 2). Sekania is wardened by its owners, WWF/Greece. There were of course **no warden posts in Daphni as the local landowners will not allow it.** Guards spoke English this year and were hard working, a big improvement. While most guards and volunteers had a good command of English overall, they were often unable to provide clear, precise answers to questions asked by the Observer regarding nesting, and condition of the beach and dunes. Archelon/STPS volunteers were often stationed at warden posts, an excellent, effective idea. The Park claimed that all warden posts were manned 24 hours per day except Stani (Kalamaki), which was manned 8am to 6pm, and Pastras (Kalamaki), which was manned only during the night. However, random checks by MEDASSET revealed **a number of occasions when the posts were unmanned during these times.** The Presidential Decree mandates guarding all over Laganas nesting beaches for 6 months from May, in Summer 2003, due to difficulties obtaining funding from the Ministry of Environment in time, **regular guarding did not start until 20th June.**
- 11) Warden posts other than Gerakas, were not obviously marked as such until August merely having the Parks poster and A4 leaflets pinned up. Although they are very functional, they could have done with a Park flag or something to attract attention. When visited again on 24/08/03 each kiosk was labelled with large, distinct ZNMP signs on each side. However, because guards often sit inside in a chair, they are inconspicuous and one kiosk originally seemed to be unattended while in fact the guard was just sitting low.
- 12) Wardens reported that most tourists coming to the nesting beaches were unaware of the turtles, and that local visitors to the beaches reacted to their recommendations with rudeness and aggression.
- 13) Random questioning of tourists by MEDASSET revealed that ZNMP/ turtle awareness levels vary, and that people are generally eager to abide by the ZNMP regulations and to

find out more about the sea turtles and restrictions. Information is not being adequately disseminated in a way that encourages visitors to understand the regulations. There is still insufficient information for tourists regarding where to place their beach furniture.

THE LAND.

E. LAGANAS AND KALAMAKI.

- 1) The sewage system of Laganas Town covering Laganas Bay, co-funded by the EC in 1999, was badly constructed, and does not function properly. As a result **sewage from hotels and Laganas village (within the area of the ZNMP) does not connect to the sewage treatment plant of Laganas town, and is being released at night into Laganas Bay.** The local press has repeatedly reported on this issue over the past 12 months. This is an enormous scandal, and the Town Mayor of Zakynthos municipality is suing the construction company. Nothing much is being done pending the outcome of the Court action.
- 2) There was an excessive amount of garbage in the sand dunes of E. Laganas and Kalamaki. Litter is a localized, not generalized, problem along the P3 area.
- 3) In July there were only 10 garbage bins in the almost 2 Km stretch of nesting beach between the Louis Zante Beach Hotel (E. Laganas) and Louros (Kalamaki) (Fig. 2), and only three information poster signs about the turtles and the Park. We were told by the Park, that more of both would be placed soon. On 24/09/03 small garbage bins with ZNMP stickers were seen along most of the length of the P3 section. Some of them were overflowing and litter was scattered around them.
- 4) A young tourist skin diving about 200 metres from the shore in front of the Louis Zante Beach Hotel in E. Laganas, reported that he found **a number of aborted turtle eggs on the seabed** and brought some ashore to show a MEDASSET volunteer. Up to 2 years ago around 12 nests per season were laid in front of the hotel, however with a change of ownership, increased night activity, and noise in the area of the hotel swimming pool and grounds, and the hotel's augmented beach furniture left in place at night in front of the hotel, there were no nests in Summer 2003. It is a biological fact that under a genetic imperative, females will only abort their eggs in the sea under conditions where it is not possible for them to nest.
- 5) The mouth of the Legenas river beside the Zante Beach Hotel Bungalows is fouled with effluent and litter, with a green algae on its surface, and discharges into the Bay, with potential consequences on water quality and hence on the health of turtles and swimmers. The smell is unbearable along the river.
- 6) No lights were seen to be shining directly onto the P3 area between Louis Zante Beach Hotel and Crystal Palace Hotel, however there was high photo-pollution from behind the beach and from across the Bay.
- 7) The area between the Louis Zante Beach Hotel and Louros (Kalamaki), almost 2 Km, was as usual the most disturbed with the Louros Guard Post only being manned from 8am to 6pm. Between 19:00 and 20:00, there were still quite a few visitors on the beach along the entire length of the Zante Beach Hotel to the Kalamaki Beach Cafeteria (about 2 klms) section, despite the ZNMP regulations to close the beach at 19:00. **Several car and bike marks were seen in this area on the sand, also horse manure and hoof-marks in the sand dunes at the top of the nesting beach.** On 17/07/03 at 7.30 pm, 7 riders were seen about 70 metres away from the wardens kiosk near the Louis Zante Beach Hotel in E Laganas, riding on the low dunes just at the top of the nesting beach. There were 4 on 18/7 in the same place, it was a daily exercise! A warden present and watching said, "They are on the dunes, not the beach, that is our agreement with them!" According to the ZNMP wardens and the ARCHELON/STPS qualified volunteers, **in Summer 2003 sea turtles showed a preference to nest in the low dunes** some of which between E. Laganas and Kalamaki border the beach between 20-30 metres from

the winter wave mark. Due to compaction of the nesting beach aggravated by heavy winter rainfall, **many nests in summer 2003 were in the softer sand of the low dunes** (see below No. 10) about 20-30 metres from the winter wave line. **The horses were seen in that area.** Any regular path created by riding or driving vehicles through an embryonic shifting sand dune system can quickly destroy sand dune morphology, affect local vegetation and may have an adverse impact on sea turtle nesting.

- 8) **Stock car racing on weekends with practising on the beach every day from January to April 2003 attracted dozens of people and up to 40 cars to Kalamaki beach.** In July an environmental employee of a big Finnish company who had been in Zakynthos for 1 month confirmed that cars and bikes were still competing occasionally at night on the nesting beach between E. Laganas and Louros in Kalamaki, where the warden post was manned only from 8am to 6pm. **There were no control barriers to access through the sand dunes.** A dirt/sand track runs from the main road to Kalamaki beach, just east of the LZBH. There are no signs to alert drivers that access is forbidden and that they are entering a protected area (Zone F2 of the ZNMP – Protected Landscape). Paths run off from this track, old spent shotgun cartridges litter the area and recent tyre marks were observed where the track joins Kalamaki beach. In August hatchling tracks were observed, as well as fresh horse manure in the low dunes at the same place.
- 9) Due to a dramatic rise in the level of the sand beneath the WWII German gun emplacement (Stani) during the winter 2002/3, **cars were driving the entire length of the beach from the Louis Zante Beach Hotel to the Crystal Palace Hotel beach (Fig. 2).** Unusual, but a fact!
- 10) There were many more bulldozed dunes since 2002 above the beach in Kalamaki to place summer furniture: In most places winter rain has unified the levelled dunes (almost to sea level) to the point that they have become one with the beach! The Park authority explained that the “summer furniture on the bulldozed dunes is not the Park’s responsibility because it is privately owned land”, and claimed that **“protection of the sand dunes is not foreseen in the Presidential Decree of the Park”**. **So they were not taking into account beach furniture on the bulldozed part of the beach in their comparisons with beach furniture limits for Kalamaki beaches set by the Presidential Decree! People had to walk over the top nesting area of sand where turtles nest in order to reach the sea! So local summer furniture operators have destroyed “private” low dunes to put the extra summer furniture that was removed from the beach in order to “satisfy” the legal requirements! However, the Presidential Decree does indeed cover protection of the area where the sand dunes are** (p.8525 point 6 area P3) and defines the area where the summer furniture is restricted to 150 umbrellas and 300 sun-beds as “between 3-5 metres from the shoreline and a “Green Belt” which is to be established at the back of the dunes”. Despite previous statements, the Park Authority were now stating that “legal action was currently being undertaken” but still went on to say “that there was not a legal restriction for summer furniture on the sand dunes”, and that “the Presidential Decree foresees the creation of a zone at the back of the beach on which the summer furniture will be placed”. **The question is, does the Presidential Decree reflect the Directives of the European Commission regarding protection of sand dunes and ecosystems?** During a night spot check by MEDASSET (00:00 – 01:00 am) on 24/08/03 at Crystal Palace Hotel, the kiosk was open, with the ZNMP guard sitting in a chair up the slope leading to the beach where the view of the beach is very limited. **The guard spoke almost no English.** Nostos kiosk was closed. The guard at the Kalamaki Beach Hotel spoke some English and explained that there was no patrolling at night along the beach.
- 11) Lights from hotels, especially from Kalamaki shone onto nesting beaches. They have not been re-orientated or shaded.
- 12) Stones from the crumbling wall have yet to be removed from the beach at Pastra, Kalamaki.

- 13) An STPS/ARCHELON volunteer at the Crystal Palace Hotel ZNMP kiosk stated that protective cages covering the nests had at times been moved around at night.
- 14) A mobile home with Italian license plates was again this year illegally parked above the beach at the Crystal Palace Hotel in August.
- 15) Raised wooden lookout platforms have been erected for lifeguards next to the Kalamaki Beach Hotel and Crystal Palace Hotel ZNMP kiosks, but are still unmanned (Pers. Com., ZNMP Guard, 23/08).
- 16) **In August, graffiti was observed for the first time, on the rocks between Stani and Crystal Palace Hotel. This was reported to the ZNMP guards, who said they were unaware of the graffiti.**
- 17) **Dinghies with outboard motors were moored off the beach at Crystal Palace Hotel on 24/09/03, an area that is strictly forbidden to boats.**

SEKANIA.

- 1) **The Garbage Treatment Plant's life was finished at least a year ago.** The Local Administration of the Island have decided to extend its life for 2 more years instead of finding a new site. We were informed, and it was reported in the Press that the garbage treatment plant on Kavalos Hill above the Vrondonero area would be upgraded sometime "soon", within the year! Meanwhile residue still overflows in the Bay, and **the plant is attracting seagulls to the nearby Sekania strictly protected nesting area, owned by WWF, where they predate on hatchlings after emergence, on their way to the sea.**
- 2) The arson fire above Sekania in 2001 resulted in some silt contamination of the beach due to winter rain run-off. Despite efforts to contain the situation, some silt still contaminates the beach due to rainfall in winter. An Athens Agricultural University project for WWF monitors these morphological changes **but the impact on nesting cannot be assessed because there is no access to the comparative nesting data collected over the past 20 years!**

DAPHNE.

General: The situation in Daphne continues to be totally out of control, a no-mans land for ZNMP Management Agency employees and conservationists!

- 1) There is a new road, uncontrolled reconstruction and further deterioration of the nesting beach.
- 2) The policy of the ZNMP Management Agency is to continue efforts to open a dialogue with the Daphne landowners so as to bring about collaboration. The attitude of the landowners continues to be **"No compensation – No cooperation!"**
- 3) **Illegal tavernas and the bar continue to operate late into the night with their lights shining onto the beach. Parking space was further enlarged.**
- 4) **The 13 illegal buildings designated by law to be pulled down remain along the beach.**
- 5) During April 2003, **new exotic plantations** were seen in Daphne, **more trees were uprooted**, 2 old Cedars that had survived the arson fire of 1995 have been felled for space to build **a new gazebo hut cafeteria**, the main road behind all constructions had disintegrated due to the winter rain and has been reopened and widened, a new building could be seen on the hill slope above the beach and several improvements and extensions on other buildings, **and a new bulldozed road in addition to the old road now winds down from the main road and parking lot, to the Daphne nesting beach. All illegal!**

- 6) Stones used to consolidate the bulldozed sandune area have rolled onto the beach, further reducing nesting potential for sea turtles. The northern end of the beach is decreasing in width due to erosion of the hillside right above it. This may contribute to a smaller nesting area on the already much compromised Daphne beach. Wooden walkways to the sea from the bars, tavernas and flattened sand dunes remain in place, limiting access of sea turtles to the nesting area.
- 7) **Lawn grass has been planted on bulldozed areas of the Daphni beach to be used for summer furniture.** Approximately 150 umbrellas and 300 sunbeds were observed on the low flattened sand dunes behind the beach (all illegal).
- 8) On 07/07/2003, swift action by the ZNMP prevented the State Electricity Service connecting to an illegal building, which under Greek Law would have given the right to legality.
- 9) **Usually there are more visitors on the beach than the 100 limit set by the Presidential Decree.**

GERAKAS.

- 1) The ZNMP kiosk was manned by two guards who were diligently informing incoming tourists of the beach-use regulations.
- 2) The beach was clean.
- 3) All beach furniture was located at the northern side of the beach and was far in excess of the legal limit.
- 4) A raised wooden lookout platform has been erected for lifeguards, but was still unmanned (Pers. Com., ZNMP Guard, 23/08).
- 5) Grazing by goats on the dunes continues to affect the stability of the dunes.

THE SEA.

- 1) The Portmaster informed us that **the patrol boat for Laganas Bay had been out of service most of the time since June 2003.** No amount of land based observation and control can replace a seagoing craft!
- 2) Although buoys demarcating protected areas of the Bay were *in situ* since June 2003, those marking the perimeter of the Bay were put in position around 07/07/03.
- 3) Several fines were imposed by the Port Authority on speeding boats in the Bay during Summer 2003. **One local regular offender was reported to pay his fines and carry on.**

“Sea-turtle spotting ” Boat trips.

On 23/8, the MEDASSET Observer joined a **ZNMP endorsed “sea-turtle spotting” boat trip.** The Observer was assured of a turtle sighting by staff “because of the fine weather”. A sign on the beach stated (in German only) that specialist guides were aboard. STPS/ARCHELON volunteers often join these tours in order to provide tourists with information on sea turtles. On this particular trip there was no volunteer. A volunteer at the STPS kiosk later said that they are often told by boat operators that there is no space for them on the boats so that they cannot join and report the fact that the drivers do not abide by ZNMP guidelines. Other times, there are reportedly not enough volunteers available to join the tours.

A sea turtle can be tracked for an entire afternoon, as the boats relieve each other so as not to lose sight of the turtle. There is a lot at stake because of a money back guarantee if no turtle is seen during the trip (STPS/ARCHELON volunteer, Pers. Com, 23/08/03). As the season progresses and fewer adult turtles are to be found in Laganas Bay, operators understandably become more desperate to locate a turtle.

During this particular trip, a routine was observed, whereby the captain of a boat that had spotted a turtle automatically signaled other boats that proceeded **to circle the turtle. The “drivers” called out to each other to track the turtle and at one time, four boats (two of them endorsed by the ZNMP) were hovering above the turtle.** The boat the Observer was on tracked the turtle from 16h20 to 16h40, and the turtle surfaced 4 times to breathe. If this was a resting female between nesting, one can only imagine the stress caused to the animal by the noise and commotion at the surface (shouts, motors revving). Heavy sea traffic is reported to cause stress to sea turtles (Bentivegna, 1993). Similar incidents were recorded by a prominent US environmentalist visiting the island (Addendum 2), STPS volunteers, and tourists.

The boat operators consistently failed to comply with the “ZNMP Guidelines for the observation of *Caretta caretta* in Laganas Bay” (see Addendum 4). Furthermore, neither information nor awareness material was provided regarding the observation guidelines, the biology and threats to sea turtles or the ZNMP.

The President of the ZNMP, Prof. Pandis, in a press interview published on 04/09/03 stated that a ZNMP representative was on board all endorsed turtle spotting boats distributing awareness material. This is contrary to observations by MEDASSET sources.

MARATHONISI.

On the islet of Marathonisi, there were ZNMP wardens and a camp with ARCHELON volunteers. Large yachts were seen to anchor or moor not far from the islet in Zone C.

- 1) On 28/06/03 the Port Police were alerted by telephone to dynamite fishing near Marathonisi islet.
- 2) In June, boats with hundreds of tourists 50 metres from the shore polluted the Bay by discharging sewage into the sea. Large boats using the Bay were reported to the Port Authority by the Park. Overall, there have been some localized signs of progress in Laganas in terms of limiting the impact of tourism, however a number of areas were identified requiring urgent attention and remediation. Clearly, there are insufficient efforts to implement relatively easy protection measures, particularly where public awareness is concerned.
- 3) On 12th July 2003 the daughter of the owner of “Cameo” disco, at Agios Sostis Islet in Laganas Bay, was married. **At 10 pm a 15 minute firework display was held at the disco, within the Park, under a full moon during the peak nesting season!**

According to CNN and Reuters in September 2003, Anders Kofoed, a Danish volunteer working for STPS/ARCHELON in Laganas Bay said: “The Park isn’t working properly. Attracted by neon lights and discos some turtles crawl up the beach the wrong way and die of dehydration or get eaten by seabirds or dogs”.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

- 1) Immediate implementation of the law with regards to the illegal buildings and developments in Daphne.
- 2) Relocate the now over-burdened garbage and sewage systems of Laganas Bay.
- 3) Commission an environmental impact assessment for the dunes system.

- 4) Make arrangements that ensure that adequate funding is available to the Park Management Agency at all times.
- 5) Patrol-boat to monitor Laganas Bay and report infringements.
- 6) Ban horse-riding from the sand dunes.
- 7) Consideration should be given to opening a Port Police post in Laganas Bay.
- 8) Formulate a management plan for the ZNMP.
- 9) Effectively block access to vehicles on the track leading from the main road to Kalamaki beach in the F3 area, ALL YEAR ROUND.
- 10) The Park should be protected all year round, with intensification of monitoring and patrolling during the Summer. **This is not a seasonal Park.**
- 11) Analysis and clean-up of the Laganas river that runs into the Bay.
- 12) Stringent monitoring of “sea-turtle watching” tours. It is critical that boats abide by the minimal distance to the turtle as outlined in the guidelines, that no more than 2 boats cluster around the turtle being observed and that people are forbidden to swim with the sea turtles. It should also be compulsory that STPS volunteers join every single “turtle spotting” trip. The ZNMP seriously risks losing face if it is found that its “certification” system is not monitored.
- 13) Clear, distinct signs to be placed at each access point to Kalamaki beach informing visitors of beach-use regulations and of the existence of the ZNMP.
- 14) All ZNMP kiosks to be manned at night, and patrols carried out throughout the night.
- 15) Progressive phasing out of excessive numbers of beach furniture on all beaches.
- 16) Efforts should be made to improve the corporate image of the ZNMP to encourage visitor interest and participation and to raise the profile of the Park in line with other European parks.
- 17) Larger garbage bins.

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.

BEACH FURNITURE, etc. – LAGANAS BAY
July and August 2003

	<u>UMBRELLAS</u>		<u>SUNBEDS</u>		<u>PEDALOES & CANOES</u>	
	<i>Observed</i>		<i>Observed</i>		<i>Observed</i>	
	<i>July 2003</i>	<i>August 2003</i>	<i>July 2003</i>	<i>August 2003</i>	<i>July 2003</i>	<i>August 2003</i>
TOTAL FOR E. LAGANAS AND KALAMAKI	289	269	578	540	36	8 + 4
<u>KALAMAKI AND LAGANAS ARE PERMITTED BY PRESIDENTIAL DECREE</u>	<u>150</u>	<u>150</u>	<u>300</u>	<u>300</u>	<u>?</u>	<u>?</u>
DAPHNE	150	150	300	300	?	?
<u>DAPHNE IS PERMITTED BY PRESIDENTIAL DECREE</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>?</u>	<u>?</u>
GERAKAS	70	95	140	210	?	4
<u>GERAKAS IS PERMITTED BY PRESIDENTIAL DECREE</u>	<u>60</u>	<u>60</u>	<u>120</u>	<u>120</u>	<u>?</u>	<u>?</u>

- **E. Laganas & Kalamaki:** In July furniture was not removed at night or stacked, including pedaloos etc.
 In August all beach furniture was stacked *in situ*.
- **Gerakas:** In double rows, stacked at night and left on the beach.

ADDENDUM 1.



The start of another Laganas Bay Turtle Nesting Season

- 1) During the winter the nesting beaches and dunes of Kalamaki and East Laganas were used as a road and for car racing. Up to forty cars per day were counted at one time in April, causing further severe damage to the sand dunes and highly compacting the nesting beach.
- 2) For the first time, this year has seen the issue of tenders for beach furniture operators by the Management body before the start of the season.
- 3) On Sunday, May 18th, MEDASSET reported to the authorities a new illegal road being built in Daphne by two bulldozers.
- 4) Since October 2002 the Zakynthos National Marine Park Management Body has made 26 complaints, to the Authorities regarding illegalities!
- 5) All illegal buildings in Daphne remain in situ. Some have been refurbished during the winter!
- 6) The Cadastral Plan defining land ownership in Laganas Bay, and delineation of the winter wave line has recently been completed, however many disputes are expected to arise.
- 7) The local landowners in Daphne area of the Park are still denying access to Park employees and conservationists...
- 8) The changes to the ZNMP Presidential Decree have not yet been made available or published in the National Gazette, prior to becoming law. We can only hope that its new provisions will provide the necessary turtle conservation measures.
- 9) The President of the ZNMP, has stated that the highly contentious land in Daphne consists of only 150.000 sq.m belonging to 12 families. Surely the Greek government should they have the political will, can solve this "problem"!
- 10) Work carried out on the existing over-burdened and over-flowing biological treatment plant above the nesting beach is claimed to extend its life for a further two years.
- 11) Latest statistics show that tourism in Zakynthos continues to rise at a rate of 13-15% per annum.
- 12) The Management body of the ZNMP remains under severe financial restraints, due to the prolonged and restrictive bureaucratic procedures through which they obtain their minimal government funding.

After the European Court of Justice (ECJ) judgement against Greece on 30th January 2002, and an on the spot inspection in August 2002, the EC announced they were not satisfied with progress, and issued further warning to the Greek government that unless progress was made the Commission would revert to the ECJ asking for punitive financial penalties to be imposed.

MEDASSET will continue to monitor the situation.

Constant lobbying and pressure applied by MEDASSET in the form of official complaints and detailed reports since 1993, to the European Commission and the Bern Convention, including an appeal to the European Ombudsman resulted in the ECJ case.

ADDENDUM 2.

MEDASSET, 1c Licavitou Street, 106 72 Athens, Greece
August 14, 2003

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a Greek-American who has been visiting Greece for thirty years, most recently along with my husband and children. Over the years, I have been increasingly alarmed at the unchecked development bearing no consideration to some of Greece's and the world's treasures. Today I am writing to discuss my observations specifically about Zakynthos and the *Carreta carreta*.

Our first trip to Zakynthos in 2000 was with mixed emotions. On one hand, we were amazed at its natural beauty, however felt exasperated by some pockets of tourists areas, the most horrific being Laganas and the ill regard for the nesting *Carreta carreta*. While Zakynthos promotes itself as caring for the *Carreta carreta*, the exploitation was obvious.

Exploitation by local tourist operators included canoes and glass bottom boats, and we witnessed both types of boats disturbing the turtles, even placing the boats on top of a submerged turtle, obstructing the turtle's ability to surface. Additionally, we observed tourists actually jumping on top of a turtle and holding on for a swim. Laganas is an example of man's intentional and unintentional threat to an endangered species.

At that time, **in 2000**, unlike the conditions in Laganas, we found Gerakas Beach a comfort as strict guidelines seemed to be enforced. There were very few tourists on the beach and it appeared that there was adherence to turtle protective measures. **Gerakas looked to be a good compromise between people and animal.**

Now, in 2003, we have just returned from another trip to Zakynthos and **were appalled at the latest developments and continued ill regard for the *Carreta carreta*. As far as Laganas is concerned, we again observed the harassment of the turtles. Glass bottom boats continue to disturb the turtles in their desperate attempts to surface.**

Also this summer, **we noted that Gerakas Beach is much more crowded although** there is a type of ranger station which distributes information to the tourists. Whether this is an effective method to help conserve the *Carreta carreta* we don't know, although we commend the effort and hope that it indeed does work.

We have touched upon Laganas, the ultimate example of unchecked and distasteful development, and on the seemingly thoughtful protection of Gerakas Beach. Without detailing all the problematical areas that we saw throughout the island, **the most troublesome is the area called Daphne. Daphne, a marine sanctuary has a new road bulldozed to it. There are tavernas with umbrellas and chairs on the sanctuary as well as planted grass for a lawn affect. Who is responsible for this debacle? A road to a small beach, a sanctuary, is only for development! Why????? Who was responsible for allowing this to occur? Certainly the current turtle protection organization on the island was ineffective. Why local government officials allowed this?**

Greece is a spectacularly beautiful country and there should be more emphasis placed on preserving the things that attract the type of tourists who have a sense of responsibility to the country, its culture and its natural resources. **We are deeply affected by our last visit to Zakynthos, and sadly we have decided it will be our last visit. We will never return to that island.**

Sincerely,
Helen Stamatacos, M.H.A.
Charles Magal, M.D.
505 Washington Street, Cumberland, MD 21502, USA

ADDENDUM 3.

From: C.Laeuchli@gmx.net [mailto:C.Laeuchli@gmx.net]
Sent: 04 September 2003, 19:51
Subject: People walk over the egg's !!!!!!!
Importance: High

First of all I would like to congratulate everyone who helps to save any wild animal like the sea-turtles! The wild animals will soon disappear from the earth if we don't care! This is why I am writing to you and hope you are going take it seriously.

I am Swiss and I am married and living in Greece. I have lived here for 7 years and it is a beautiful country, but the Greeks don't care much about the wildlife!!!!

What I'd like to tell you is that we were on holiday for 3 days in Zakynthos and on a Sunday visited the very popular Gerakas Beach. When we arrived, we were asked if we had been there before. My husband was there before and said yes. But it was years ago on this beach and he didn't know about the turtle's nesting.

I asked for more information and we were told not to walk more than 5 metres from the water, because they have about 40 nests of eggs, and did not know where they were and they had found about 11 so far.

It was the end of July 2003. When we went down to the beach, we got two beach seats and an umbrella which cost us 8 Euro!! The men who we paid said that this is to contribute to the efforts to save the turtles which would take about 2-3 Euro.

This was OK, but later we got quite upset because most of the many Greek tourists, and also German's who didn't speak English, were walking right through the sand in the middle of the possible nests!!

This could be avoided very simply with a red and white tape, which is often used for street safety! So nobody would get into the possible area of the nests. But nothing of this was done. Also when we walked along the beach we could see 2 fresh turtle tracks and an unmarked turtle-nest!!

If this lazy protection continues, then in a few years I don't think we will have any turtles left!!

I hope you take this really seriously and you are very welcome to call me for detailed information.

Yours sincerely,

Cornelia Laeuchli

ADDENDUM 4.

ZNMP Guidelines for the Appropriate Observation of *Caretta caretta* in the sea zone of the ZNMP (Laganas Bay)

Rules for the appropriate observation of sea turtles:

- 1) The minimum distance for observing sea turtles when they are at the surface is 10-15m and 3-5m when they are submerged.
- 2) The sea turtle should not be observed for more than 10 minutes per hour when it is at the surface and 15 minutes when it is submerged.
- 3) There should be no physical contact with the sea turtle.
- 4) The turtle-watching boat should not obstruct movements of the turtle
- 5) No more than two boats should be observing the turtle at any one time
- 6) The maximum speed when observing the sea turtle should not exceed 2 nautical miles/hour
- 7) The observations should be carried out between 11:00 am and 5:00 pm.
- 8) The boat's 'waiting distance' should be 45m from the turtle.
- 9) It is forbidden for the boat operators and their clients to swim with the sea turtles.
- 10) There should be no more than 25 people per boat. This number is function of the boat category.

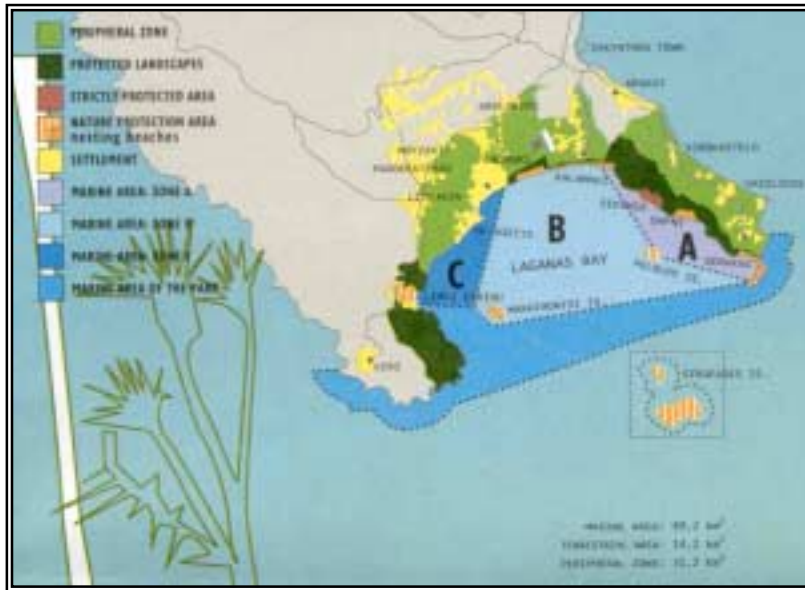


Fig. 1: Zakynthos National Marine Park Map (Source: ZNMP)

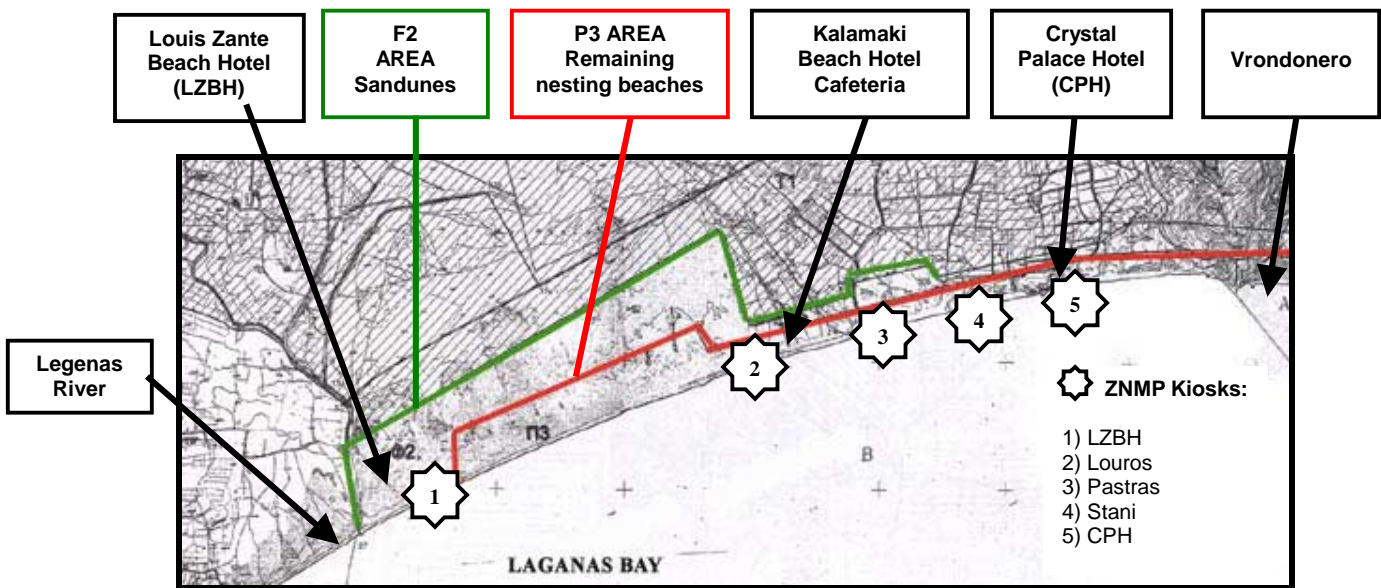


Fig. 2: Map of E. Laganas and Kalamaki nesting beaches (scale: 1:5000).



Photo 1: Gerakas beach with lifeguard post to the left. The number of umbrellas and sunbeds clearly exceeds legal limits.

© 2003 MEDASSET – Photo: M-A Dunais



Photo 2. *Kalamaki:* Natural water course concreted over to form Hotel road to the nesting beach... meets its fate!
© 2003 MEDASSET – Photo: L. Venizelos



Photo 3. *Kalamaki:* Beach extension made by flattening the dunes to accommodate excess beach furniture.
© 2003 MEDASSET – Photo: L. Venizelos



Photo 4. *Daphne beach:* Sea of umbrellas on lawns where sand dunes used to be.
© 2003 MEDASSET



Photo 5. *Daphne beach*: Bar encroaches onto the nesting beach, with bulldozed road on the hill behind.
© 2003 MEDASSET



Photo 6. *Daphne beach*: Nesting beach with parked cars, umbrellas, "infill dumping" and new illegal thatched roof construction.
© 2003 MEDASSET



Photo 7. *Daphne beach*: New (2003) bulldozed road winds down to the nesting beach.
© 2003 MEDASSET



Photo 8. *Daphne beach:* We wonder what the building blocks are for? (18/7/03)
© 2003 MEDASSET



Photo 9. *Daphne beach:* Under construction! (18/7/03)
© 2003 MEDASSET



Photo 10: A loggerhead turtle is surrounded by 4 boats, three of them endorsed by the NMPZ, in blatant breach of 'turtle-spotting' guidelines.
(Photo was taken from fourth boat)
© 2003 MEDASSET – Photo: M-A Dunais