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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

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Specific File

**Management of the Akamas Peninsula
and Limni Site in Cyprus**

Report by the NGOs:

Cyprus Conservation Foundation
Federation of Environmental and Ecological Organisation of Cyprus
Friends of the Akamas Organisation

*Secretariat Memorandum
Prepared by
the Directorate of Culture and Natural and Cultural Heritage*

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1.

ΚΥΠΡΙΑΚΟ ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΠΡΟΣΤΑΣΙΑΣ ΤΟΥ ΠΕΡΙΒΑΛΛΟΝΤΟΣ
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Partners of: European Centre for Nature Conservation (ECNC), Planta Europa, Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP)

CONSERVATION OF THE AKAMAS AND LIMNI AREAS IN WESTERN CYPRUS: THREATS POSED TO WILDLIFE BY DEVELOPMENT NEAR OR WITHIN THESE AREAS.

This report is presented as an update to the reports presented over the past seven years, and as an exposition of recent developments

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1. Summary

The Akamas peninsula in N.W Cyprus is an area of exceptional ecological significance which is *inter alia*, a nesting ground for the endangered green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), while the Limni coast further north is an important nesting area for the loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*). While plans for the protection of Akamas have been declared, but not implemented, the status of the Limni coast is as yet uncertain and has been left to be settled by local Government within the Natura 2000 network which Cyprus is adopting as part of its accession process to the European Community.

The Standing Committee issued Recommendation no.63/97, inviting the Cyprus Government to take appropriate action to protect the area, and conducted two on-the-spot appraisals (1997 and 2002), the second of which - the Ellul report - was presented to the committee last year. The report identified that many of the measures proposed by the Cyprus Government for Akamas were incompatible with sustainable management and long term protection.

At the last meeting the Committee expressed its dissatisfaction and called upon the Cyprus Government to comply with Recommendation 63/97 and other specific measures, including the provision of a detailed management plan. This has not happened, but due to the accession of Cyprus to the EU within 2004, some measures – the details of which are unknown – are thought to be imminent. It is therefore recommended that the file should remain open and the situation continue to be monitored.

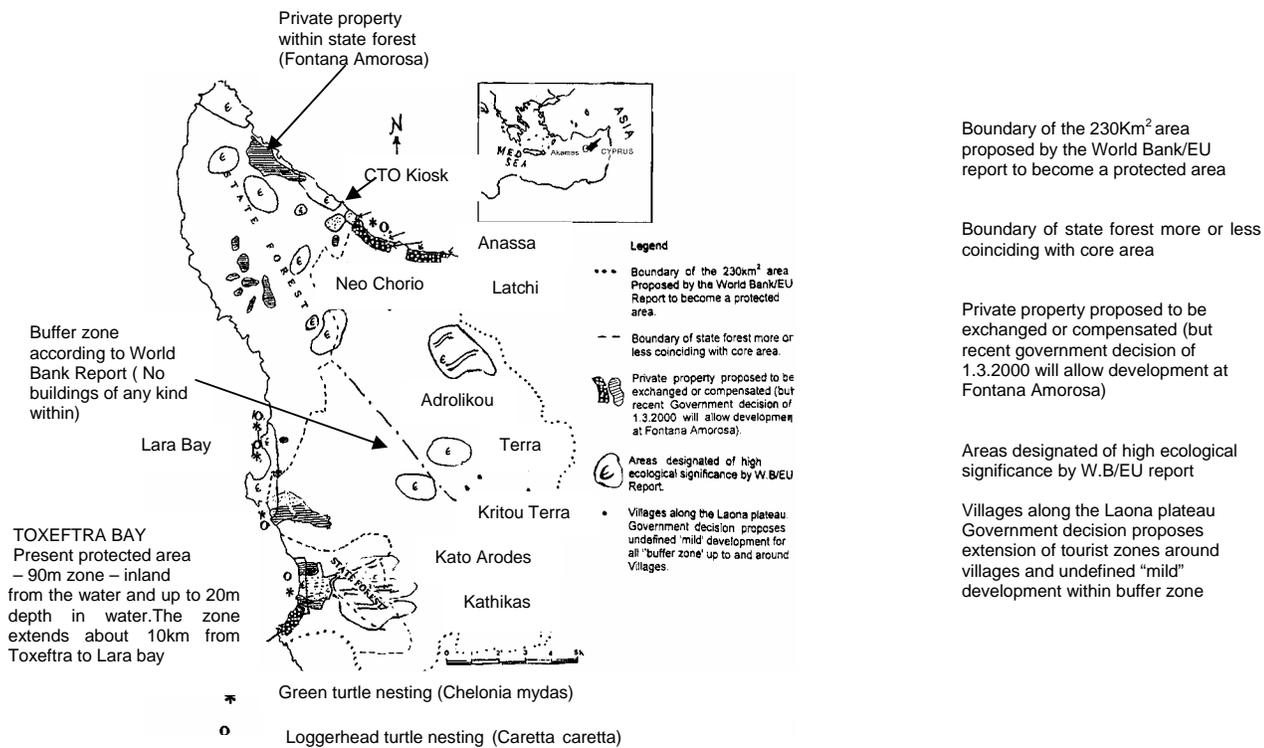
2. Background

The Akamas Peninsula in north- western Cyprus is an area of 230 km² lying at the meeting point of three continents. Apart from its geological interest and scenic beauty, it provides a habitat for flora and fauna, which in some cases is endemic, rare or protected under the Bern Convention. The area is exceptionally rich in biodiversity and its beaches provide nesting grounds for green and loggerhead turtles (*Chelonia mydas* and *Caretta caretta*). A list of the most important floral and faunal species is attached as Appendix A to this report.

Following a request by the Cyprus Government in 1992, a project was set up by the World Bank's Mediterranean Technical Assistance Programme (METAP), and funded jointly by the World Bank

and the EU, to prepare a management plan for the Akamas. This resulted in a report, usually referred to as the 'World Bank Study', published in 1995. It called for the strict protection of the beaches and the core area (which largely corresponds to the state forest) and the creation of buffer zones around it, which would be restricted to traditional activities, with little or no development taking place.

The protective measures proposed by the report have been the subject of lengthy controversy by land owners and locals. Thus, despite the support of environmental NGOs, the report has not been implemented. In the 90's permission was given for the erection of the Anassa Beach Hotel, a 350 bed luxury tourist complex owned by the family of a former Minister of Foreign Affairs, on land which the World Bank report designated as buffer zone. The hotel has been operational for over three years. The siting of this hotel and its impact on wildlife has, since 1996, been the subject of our annual reports to this Committee. These lead to the opening of a file and an on-the-spot appraisal.



In 1997 the Permanent Committee of the Bern Convention, through its Recommendation no.63, proposed ten measures to secure the long term protection of the Akamas and Limni coasts.

In view of the slow progress evidenced, and the importance of the site on a European scale, the file has remained open since then. A further on-the-spot visit was held in 2002, followed by the report of specialist Anthony Ellul, which was considered by this committee last year.

3. Situation so far

In July 2002 the EU Commissioner for the Environment formally visited Cyprus, met with the President of the Republic, and on 3.7.02 the Council of Ministers announced its decision on the Akamas, which was an improvement on its decision of 3.3.2000 but still left a number of matters unresolved, such as:

- The proposed road from Inia and erection of a community centre near the coast (both of which were criticised in the Ellul report and contravene point 8 of the Committee's Recommendation 63/1997)
- The continuation of the tourist zones on either side of Akamas (contrary to Recommendation 63/1997 and the Ellul Report).
- The fact that hunting in the Akamas has not been banned.
- The fact that so far no map indicating the extent and impact of the Council of Ministers decision has been issued. (Please note that the map on the preceding page is an informal one developed from the World Bank Report).

Moreover, it should be noted that no measures have been announced to protect the coast on either side of Akamas, where noisy water sports and other activities take place in front of the existing tourist development. The situation on the beach of the Anassa Beach Hotel (sun beds, mechanical cleaning, photopollution, jetty), has improved slightly in that sun beds have decreased, but the noisy sea sports are still there (contrary to point 9, Recommendation 63/97).

4. Action recommended

At the time of writing this report no actual implementation of Government decisions regarding the Akamas has yet taken place. The new Government, which was elected in 2003, has been reviewing the situation, but no final decisions have been announced. It is however, expected that this will happen soon because of the island's imminent accession to the EU.

In view of the fact that the wildlife and biodiversity of Akamas continue to be under threat, and until there are clearer indications that the Cyprus Government intends to take all necessary measures to ensure that activity in and around Akamas is sustainable, we ask that the file on this issue remain open and that monitoring of the situation should continue.

2.

- **FEDERATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECOLOGICAL ORGANIZATIONS OF CYPRUS**
 - **FRIENDS OF THE AKAMAS ORGANIZATION**
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1. THE AKAMAS PENINSULA

It is considered that the decision of the Council of Ministers of the Government of Cyprus of July 3rd 2002 is still valid, due to the fact that the newly elected Government has not proceeded to any alterations yet.

To our opinion, the above decision could have a negative and irreversible impact on the conservation and sustainable management of the peninsula as follows we are deeply concerned about the following points:

1. The decision fails to adopt either the “Local Plan of the Wider Akamas Area” carried out by the Town Planning and Housing Department of the Ministry of Interior [1989], or the UNDP - World Bank - CEC “Conservation Management Plan for the Akamas Peninsula” [1995]. The decision gives instructions for a “Development Plan” to be drafted by the Town Planning and Housing Department in collaboration with the local authorities, the Environmental Service and other bodies and organizations involved, whereas the lack of a management plan so far with environmental criteria, has been the cause of gradual deterioration of the area and permanent loss of ecologically sensitive areas.

The decision does not include the set up of any scientific committee, which would draft and implement a detailed conservation-management plan with environmental criteria and based on the 2 above mentioned existing plans, with the participation of all the stakeholders. So far, mainly the Town Planning and Housing Department, has had several meetings with the local authorities. The Federation of Environmental and Ecological Organizations, which was foreseen to participate according to the previous ministerial decisions, has been so far completely ignored although the plan is supposed to be finalized by the end of December 2002!

2. Regarding the tourist zones of Agios Georgios Pegeias and Asprokremmos, the Council of Ministers decision of July 2002, retains them both, with undiminished building coefficients. Given the environmental sensitivity of both areas and adjacent regions (e.g. turtle nesting areas, monk seal *Monachus-monachus* caves, unique flora and fauna species) and the scale of development expected to take place, it is certain that the results will be catastrophic for the environment, not only on the habitats and species but also on the landscape. In addition to the above, this type of large-scale tourist development will undermine the mild tourism advocated for the Akamas villages. A major drawback is that the buffer zone aspect of these areas is totally undermined.
3. The decision foresees the designation of a new tourist zone on state land adjacent to the Akamas state forest, whereas this land should have been maintained as a buffer zone to the future nature reserve area.
4. Furthermore, the decision provides for pockets of development in sensitive areas to the west of the villages, away from the village development areas.
5. The buffer zone adjacent to the state forest has been targeted for reduction in width.
6. The coastal road to Lara has been widened and “upgraded” as a city road. The gravel road from Ineia village to Lara has been concrete-paved. Aspros River near Toxeftra is still operating and has been further extended as well (this is the third illegal restaurant operated and extended in the Akamas area – in spite of specific mention on this issue in the Standing Committee recommendations).

All of the above mentioned, greatly undermine the sustainability of Akamas. In addition the non-application by the authorities [both local and central] of the laws of Cyprus in the area, raises the fears that Akamas will be degraded piecemeal as this is the case in the reality for the last twenty years. A good example of this is the sea-caves area south of Agios Georgios, a former seal habitat that has been developed beyond any principles of conservation. Another example is the Anassa Hotel on the Asprokremmos beach, which is operating having violated scores of conditions and regulations. The hotel is operating without the official final approval of the appropriate District Officer of Paphos and confirmation is yet expected that the development complies with its building permit.

7. The entire Asprokremmos bay is a nesting site for the sea turtles. However, in three areas inside the bay (in front of Anassa Hotel, at Aphrodite Apartments and at Takkas restaurant) there is illegal operation of sand beds and umbrellas, together with water sports (jet ski etc). The operation of these “facilities” is illegal, since the coast has not been declared as an “organized coast” according to the Shore Act and the National Committee of Coasts, which is the board responsible for this purpose.

2. THE LIMNI AREA

1. The Limni area is not protected by any plan at all, although it is a major nesting site for Loggerhead turtles and thus it should have been protected by some plan similar to the Lara area.
2. The Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment has evidently granted permission for the use of state forest land adjacent to the beach and to the beach itself to a developer [Cyprus Sulphur and Copper Mine Company Ltd], so that he can have access to the sea and to use the turtle-nesting beach without hinderance, in favor of his planned huge development complex. The details of this act have not been released to the public.
3. At the same time there is a lot of pressure to change the zoning of the area from agricultural to touristic, to accommodate a huge tourist complex and generally to increase the existing building coefficient.
4. A recent environmental impact assessment (EIA) for coastal protection of the area, has strongly recommended that no hard coastal engineering works should be constructed in the Limni area (like breakwaters, groynes, marinas etc). Our information is that there is pressure for this kind of structures, despite the recommendations of the EIA.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COMMITTEE:

We request from the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention to keep the Akamas and Limni file open, and ask the Government of Cyprus to implement **urgently** its relevant Recommendations.

Due attention should also be paid to the following points, at this stage:

- Follow up of all the necessary procedures [Common Council, Town planning Board etc] to establish the “Local Plan of the wider Akamas area”(1989) after adopting the World Bank Conservation Management Plan for Akamas (UNDP-WORLD BANK-CEC [METAP]1995).
- Adopt the boundaries of the area of Akamas [which are same with those proposed by the “World Bank Plan”], and the Limni area as recorded in the LIFE project of 1998 (Special Areas of Conservation [Directive 92/43/EEC] in Cyprus) i.e., the habitat map of the site of Chersonisos Akamas [CY4000010] and the habitat map of the site of Polis-Gialia area [CY4000001]). These sites are expected to be identical to the Emerald network sites to be proposed and should be ratified according to the Cyprus laws, regulations and procedures.
- Work out a detailed conservation - management plan for the area based on the above plans and boundaries, with the participation of all stakeholders involved, and set up a monitoring committee including experts of the Council of Europe-Bern Convention, European Union-DG Environment, and the IUCN, to follow up the implementation of this management plan.

- Freeze all tourist development in the two existing coastal zones until a final management plan is adopted and withhold any additional tourist or similar development zones elsewhere in Akamas, which will inevitably affect the conservation of the area.
- Demolish all buildings and plants illegally constructed in the area and restore the sites to their original state e.g., in Aspros River, Avagas gorge, Toxeftra, Lara, Asprokremmos etc. [This should include remedies for any illegal actions relating to the Anassa Hotel, which is evidently operating without final approval).
- Prohibit completely any water sports activities in the entire Asprokremmos Bay. To allow only the operation of beds and umbrellas on the beach, only in restricted parts of the beach and under strict regulations.
- Take steps to apply the Cyprus laws and regulations, by appointing appropriate officers to deal with all relevant violations in the area.
- Secure that no engineering works are constructed in the sea at Limni area, according to the relevant EIA's recommendations.
- Cancel the agreement according to which the state forestland adjacent to the coast of Limni area has been granted for use to the Cyprus Sulphur & Copper Company Ltd.
- Give Limni area the same protection status as Lara.

We feel it is of outmost importance for representatives of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention to visit Cyprus and continue monitoring the situation.

On behalf of

the Federation of Environmental and Ecological Organisations of Cyprus
and
the Friends of the Akamas

AntoniaTheodosiou