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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

33rd meeting
Strasbourg, 3-6 December 2013

File Open

**Threats to Marine Turtles
in Thines Kiparissias Bay
(Greece)**

REPORT BY THE COMPLAINANT

- UPDATED ON 26 AUGUST 2013 -

*Document prepared by
Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles (MEDASSET)*

Marine Turtle Conservation in the Mediterranean
*for the 33rd Standing Committee Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on
the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention)*
2nd Meeting of the Bureau

**DEVELOPMENT PLANS IN KYPARISSIA BAY, SOUTHERN KYPARISSIA
(WESTERN
PELOPONNESE, GREECE)
UPDATE REPORT BY MEDASSET**

1st August 2013

Following the complaint submitted on 22 August 2010 for the 30th Standing Committee Meeting (T-PVS (2010) 16E) regarding developments threatening Kyparissia Bay, the response of the Greek authorities to the European Commission (sent on the 22nd December 2010) forwarded to the Bureau Meeting on 8 March 2011 (T-PVS/Files (2011) 5E), MEDASSET's update reports sent to the Bureau on 2 September 2011 and on 29 March 2012, ARCHELON's short Report sent to the European Commission and the Bern Convention (October 2012) as well the decision of the Standing Committee (T-PVS (2012) Misc 1+2) to keep the complaint as a possible file, emphasising on the need to be informed by the Greek authorities on the state of the situation in the area by 15 March 2013, we wish to present to the Bureau a summary of the current situation in Kyparissia Bay, a NATURA 2000 site, (THINES KYPARISSIAS – GR2550005).

In April 2012 the Secretariat of the Bern Convention announced that due to the ecological importance of the region and to MEDASSET's complaints, an on- the spot appraisal should be performed. The Ministry of Environment's response to the Bern Convention's request to arrange for the on-the spot appraisal is still pending.

In September 2012 The European Commission (EC) sent a Reasoned Opinion to Greece for failure to fully protect the endangered sea turtle *Caretta caretta* of the Mediterranean, in accordance with the European Union's (EU) Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild flora and fauna).

In November 2012, the Ministry of Environment Energy & Climate Change informed the EC that a detailed Action Plan for the protection of the area in question is currently being elaborated. The aim of the Action Plan will be to halt any current development works in the area until the issuance of the Ministerial Decision, which will constitute the basis for the protection of the area until a Presidential Decree is in place, as envisaged by paragraph 9, article 6 of 3937/2011 bill.

In more detail, the devised Plan will involve the following steps/actions:

- The maps for the Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) corresponding to "Thines Kyparissias" (GR2550005) and adjacent N2000 sites (GR2330008 & GR2330005) are currently being updated by the Ministry. Current geographical coordinates of the areas in question do not correspond with real geographical information on these areas.
- A Ministerial Decision (KYA) that is currently drafted will halt current development works or any other intervention in both the terrestrial and marine sections of the SAC until a Presidential Decree (PD) for the area is in place. More specifically:
- Any building activities within the area(s) in question will be immediately suspended and no permits for any other building activity will be issued until the Ministerial Decision (MD) is in place.
- Local Authorities (Prefecture and municipalities) will check if any infrastructure or development works are currently planned or are being implemented and suspend them until the MD and later the PD are in place.
- Any planned or future allotments of sections of the shore belonging to the area in question by municipal Authorities will be suspended until the MD has been issued.

This far no Ministerial decision has been issued or any temporary protection measures have been put in place.

According to the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change, the Ministerial Decision will constitute the basis for the protection of the NATURA 2000 site until a Presidential Decree for the area is affected. The MD will be drafted based on the Special Environmental Study (SES) carried out by ARCHELON and submitted to the Ministry in 2002. The MD will consider in detail the following:

- The structure/body responsible for the management of the area based on existing legislation.
- The procedure by which duties and responsibilities are assigned to other bodies or agencies that can undertake the management of the area is currently being simplified.
- Management measures for the area will be elaborated for the entire duration of the Ministerial Decision, whose effectiveness will be evaluated prior to the drafting of a PD.
- With regard to the enforcement of management measures, responsibilities and management duties will be assigned to different Local Authorities depending on their jurisdiction.
- The Special Environmental Study (SES) elaborated by ARCHELON and submitted to the Ministry in 2002 is currently being updated prior to the drafting of the PD.

A Steering Committee consisting of members representing Local and National Authorities, NGOs and experts has been established in order to supervise the implementation of the afore mentioned Action Plan. MEDASSET and ARCHELON are jointly represented.

However, despite the assurances of the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change, MEDASSET wishes to inform the Secretariat of the Bern Convention for the following recent unpleasant developments:

Since late **November 2012**, as reported by ARCHELON, a new house is being constructed behind the beach in the core nesting area near Vounaki hill (sector B). Work constructions took place in the sand dunes zone and resulted in the deterioration of the sand dunes and destruction of dune vegetation (Pictures 1, 2 and 3). Details on the construction license were requested by ARCHELON from both the Planning Authority of Trifylia and the Public Land Authority and the examination of the case revealed that a permit for three houses has been issued outside the city planning area.

On **20 February 2013**, as reported by ARCHELON, a part of the back of the beach in the core nesting area (sector C) was plowed. This is the area between Agiannakis and Elaia where the five illegal roads were constructed during 2011 and 2012. The plowing resulted one more time in the destruction of dune vegetation (Pictures 4 and 5).

Recent Developments during February – August 2013

Kalo Nero Beach (O Sector)

The Illegal wooden platforms on the beach of Kalo Nero remain despite the demolition protocols that have been issued from the Land Management Agency of Kalamata.

Sunbeds and umbrellas occupy almost 100% of the beach in Kalo Nero and are not removed during nighttime. Sunbeds and umbrellas were placed as early as late May without the consent of the Minister Environment Energy and Climate Change (YPEKA) and therefore the necessary permission from the Municipality of Trifylia.

The beach in Kalo Nero suffers from intense light pollution at night (from private and public sources of light) while excessive vehicular traffic on the coast road of Kalo Nero at nighttime is causing harassment to nesting turtles.

Generally the situation in Kalo Nero has not improved at all over the past year but it has become worse. The Municipality of Trifylia did not allow ARCHELON to erect the seasonal information station so that visitors in the area could be informed about the efforts of the NGO to protect this threatened species. This, combined with the lack of informative sign-posting has caused a considerable increase in the number of tourists on the beach at night, thus causing disturbance to emerging female turtles that come to lay their eggs and highly threatening emerging hatchlings which try to make it to the sea.

Beach Sector between Neda River and Kalo Nero beach (A, B, C Sectors)

The Plowing of the dunes recorded in February 2013 was repeated in April 2013 (with the blessings of the Mayor of Trifylia).

The construction of two houses in the area of Vounaki that commenced in December 2012 is still progressing, while planning permission has been given for the construction of another 2 buildings in the area.

However, the issuance of building permits has been suspended for a part of the NATURA 2000 site since late May 2013 (Bill (FEK): 180/24-5-2013).

Canteens have stopped operating on the beach since no licenses were issued this year.

Intense light pollution at night on some parts of the beach (from private and public sources of light), the evident lack of informative sign-posting and the presence of vehicles (4-wheel drive and quad-bikes) throughout the day constitute few more of the main threats on this important nesting site.

General Remarks

Human presence on the beach at night during the nesting season has been recorded by ARCHELON Research personnel on a daily basis. As a result adult turtles that attempt to nest return to the sea without successfully doing so. This is verified by the large number of emergency tracks recorded daily on the nesting site by ARCHELON researchers. In addition, a high number of nests have been purposefully vandalized by humans almost on a daily basis since the start of the nesting season.

It has become apparent that the efforts of the NGOs to protect this important NATURA 2000 site and report on the threats that it currently faces, have caused a series of local reactions. Almost on a daily basis, members of ARCHELON personnel are threatened both verbally and physically by local people that have a stake in the area's anticipated development. ARCHELON's scientific equipment was stolen in June 2013 and the scientific programme's vehicle was vandalized in late July 2013.

Unfortunately, no Action Plan has been elaborated yet for the area in question while the Steering Committee responsible for supervising the implementation of the Action Plan and for drafting a Ministerial Decision (MD) has convened only twice so far.

Given that:

- no temporary management measures for the area have been elaborated yet (the nesting season is coming to an end shortly)
- The drafting of the MD and of a PD is still pending

We hereby wish to request that Complaint (T-PVS (2010) 16E) be placed on the Agenda of the 33rd Meeting of the Standing Committee. MEDASSET urges the Secretariat to follow up through the Greek Government regarding progress made over the afore mentioned Action Plan, and the elaboration of an MD and in particular over the cessation of all infrastructure and/or development activities, which pose an immense threat for Thines Kyparissias.



Picture 1: The new constructed house near Vounaki hill (sector B).



Picture 2: The destruction of dune vegetation.



Picture 3: The destruction of dune vegetation.



Picture 4: The sand dune vegetation in the area between Agiannakis and Elaia before the plowing (in the picture is also visible one of the five illegal roads).



Picture 5: The sand dune vegetation after the plowing in February 2013.



Picture 6: The sand dune vegetation after the plowing in April 2013.



Picture 7: Vehicle traffic is heavily impacting this unique ecosystem and disturbs nesting female *Caretta caretta* and threatens emerging hatchlings.



Picture 7: Building development still progresses (Vounaki).



Picture 8: Light pollution in Kalo Nero poses a major threat to emerging nesting turtles and disorients hatchlings.



Picture 9: Sand dunes that have been converted into agricultural land.



Picture 10: Wooden corridors and beach furniture minimize the available nesting space in Kalo Nero.

UPDATE REPORT BY THE NGO**March 11th 2013***Document presented by****MEDASSET - the Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles******for the 33rd Standing Committee Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention)***

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