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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

35th meeting
Strasbourg, 1-4 December 2015

Possible File

**Threat to the Mediterranean monk seal
(*Monachus monachus*) in Turkey**

REPORT BY THE GOVERNMENT

*Document prepared by
The Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs, Turkey*

- RECEIVED IN OCTOBER 2015 -

GOVERNMENT REPORT

ON COMPLAINT NO: 2011 / 4: THREAT TO MEDITERRANEAN MONK SEAL IN TURKEY

It was stated in the previous reports that this case was before the Turkish national court. Recently, the Court has made its decision and the decision was in favor of construction of the harbor. Now, the complainant NGO, Underwater Research Society, has lodged an appeal with the Supreme Court.

The Yeşilovacık Harbor Project, consisting of building a filling area and construction of a port, is pursued by Yeşilovacık Harbor Enterprises Inc. The Environmental Impact Assessment of this construction was completed in 2008. Based on an “ecosystem evaluation report” prepared by three professors from Ankara University as a part of Environmental Impact Assessment, it was committed by the company that the Mediterranean Monk Seal population would be monitored. According to this commitment, the construction company is obliged to finance the monitoring activities of the Monk Seal. Within this scope, academic staff from Ankara University is monitoring the area and they present quarterly reports to the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs. Besides, a full-time aquaculture engineer is employed to monitor the effects of construction activities in a timely manner. Our authorities have received two monitoring reports since the beginning of 2015.

Reports on monitoring of the monk seal activities around the port

The first report mentions that the monitoring system in the area is working well. There are 6 observation points (See App. 1) one of which (GN-2) has a video camera recording 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. As the analysis of video recorder reveals, there was one monk seal activity around the construction site. This young monk seal was recorded on February 3, 2015, and considering the size of the monk seal, it was probably the one which was mentioned to be born in the previous monitoring period. (See App.2) The report also mentions that the construction of fill area and the piles of the port was completed, and the construction of superstructure of the port was still continuing at that time. It was also reported that the construction of piles and fill area resulted in creation of a new littoral habitat and species like acorn barnacle (*Semibalanus balanoides* Linnaeus, 1767), rayed Mediterranean limpet (*Patella caerulea* Linnaeus, 1758), Chlorophyta and Odophyta species, macroalgae and microalgae belonging to Cyanophyta phylum were observed in the habitat. The habitat was also rich in diatom species and with the settlement of new species, pelagic fish species like common dolphinfish (*Coryphaena hippurus* Linnaeus 1758), yellowstripe barracuda (*Sphyraena chrysotaenia* Klunzinger, 1884), yellowtail barracuda (*Sphyraena flavicauda* Rüppell, 1838) and Cephalopoda species like common squid (*Loligo vulgaris* Lamarck, 1798) and common octopus (*Octopus vulgaris* Cuvier, 1797) started to be observed, even some predator fish species were observed. This increase in food availability resulted in an increase in the sightings of monk seal.

The second report mentions about, besides continuous monitoring at the six observation points, installation of new cameras under the sea. A new camera capable of rotating 360° was installed at the edge of the port and it became active on September 1st, 2015. In this monitoring period, three different sightings of monk seals occurred. On March 10th, 2015, a monk seal was observed for 20 minutes. This was thought to be the same individual which was observed one month ago. The second sighting was 3 days later, on March 13th, 2015. (See App. 3) This individual was observed for 50 minutes, and this was thought to be female monk seal. The last observation mentioned in the second report is on April 29, 2015. This was observed and recorded for 6 minutes. Comparing with the previous reporting season, monk seals were observed more in the close vicinity of the port.

Implementation of the Action Plan

Number and Name of the Activity In the Plan	Current situation of implementation
<p>1.1 Cave Inventory Studies</p> <p>1.1.1 The caves which are used by monk seals will be determined and labeled on a digital map.</p> <p>1.1.2 The threats on monk seal caves will be determined.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A protocol was signed between METU Marine Sciences Institution (the complainant) and provincial directorate of the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs on 04 June 2015. The protocol includes determination of caves actively used by monk seals and monitoring of monk seal activities in these caves. This study will be completed by the end of 2015.
<p>1.2 Population Inventory Studies</p> <p>1.2.1 By using phototrap, the number of monk seals and sex and age ratios of the population will be determined.</p> <p>1.2.2 A web site and a call center will be created for monk seal observations and the notifications received will be recorded in the website. This call center will also serve for urgent situations of monk seals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Underwater camera sets and GPS devices have been purchased. 30 phototrap were ordered and they will have been installed by the end of 2015. The data obtained from the phototrap will be analysed and used in determination of sex and age ratio of the population and also rate of fertility. A web site was built and became operational. The existing report line (0 324 481 22 84) for sea turtle rehabilitation center has been arranged to serve for monk seals also. This new report line has been announced in hand brochures and Gendarmerie and local governments have been informed about this new line. There were two reports received until today, stating that two different monk seals have been observed around Mersin Harbor.
<p>2.1 Protection of Habitats</p> <p>2.1.1 Informing stakeholders about the habitats that monk seals use.</p> <p>2.1.2 Hanging out warning and/or information signs around the important terrestrial sites close to monk seal habitats.</p> <p>2.1.3 Evaluating the existing legislation about monk seals and improving them to serve for mitigating threats to monk seal habitats.</p> <p>2.1.4 Increasing the precautions to protect the monk seal cave in Akkum locality of Silifke District.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This activity was assessed within the scope of education and awareness raising issues. Manufacturing of the warning and information signs started with the help of Erdemli Industrial High School, they will be completed and hanged by the end of 2015. A Ministerial Manifest is still being prepared at the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs, about protection of monk seal and its habitats throughout Turkish coasts of Mediterranean, Egean and Marmara Seas. Bilateral relations were increased between local branches of Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs and that of Ministry of Culture and Tourism to improve the protection status of monk seal cave in Akkum locality. It was agreed that local branch of the ministry of culture and tourism will pay regard to the monk seal cave in their plans and they requested for extra information about the rules and regulations. In February 2015, a written report, which is about the precautions to be taken to protect the monk seal cave, prepared in cooperation with METU Marine Sciences Institution was sent to local branch of ministry of culture and tourism.

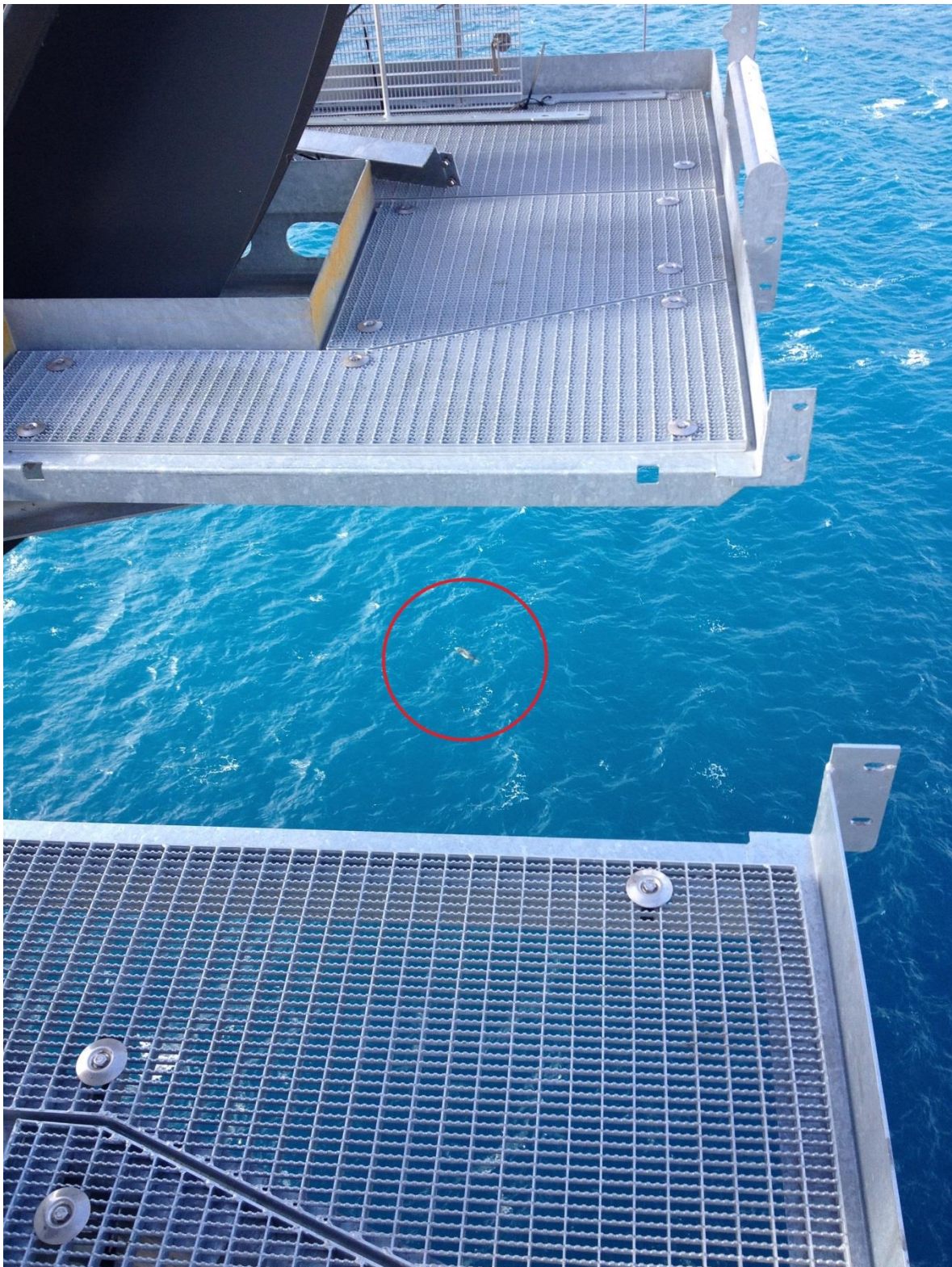
<p>2.1.5 Cooperation, in general, with the stakeholders to better implement protection precautions.</p> <p>2.1.6 Making fisheries install outer protective nets for their breeding cages.</p> <p>2.1.7 To determine the acceptable distance for noise creating activities depending on the decibel level, using this guide to evaluate the planned activities that may have negative effects on monk seal habitats. Besides, for activities which do not have noise impact, evaluating the threat level of the activity through a scientific research. Allowing the activities only if the scientific reports approves them.</p> <p>2.1.8 To determine, in order to protect the monk seals, the route that yachts will use when the Aydıncık Marina is completed, as it is as close as 2 km to the monk seal cave in the region.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange of views, with all the stakeholders and particularly with Mersin University and METU Marine Sciences Institution is made throughout the year to better implement the action plan. • This issue is followed by local branch of ministry of food, agriculture and livestock. The related ministry is pushing all the fisheries to complete the instalment of outer protective nets. • Not much progress has been made. Investing activities are still evaluated based on the map for monk seal habitats, which is an appendix of the action plan. • A meeting which includes all the stakeholders will be held in November 2015, to determine the route that yachts will use.
<p>2.2 Protection of the Species</p> <p>2.2.1 Creating a communication tool for both notification of dead or injured monk seals and also for increasing communication between the institutions.</p> <p>2.2.2 In cooperation with Underwater Research Society, there will be a study about bringing a speed limit for sportive activities in the sea, where the region is defined as a monk seal habitat in the action plan. The results of this study will be shared with the ministry of transport, maritime affairs and communication.</p> <p>2.2.3 The veterinarians employed by the Ministry in coastal regions will have an education about caring injured monk seals, and the education will be provided by the experts of Underwater Research Society and METU Marine Sciences Institution.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A website was prepared as it was mentioned under activity 1.2.2. This website will serve for both monk seal observations and also for urgent situations. Besides, a reporting line was arranged for monk seals. (0324 481 22 84) • This study is still going on and it was also assessed in the Ministerial Manifest mentioned in activity 2.1.3. • The education program will be implemented in 2015 and 2016.

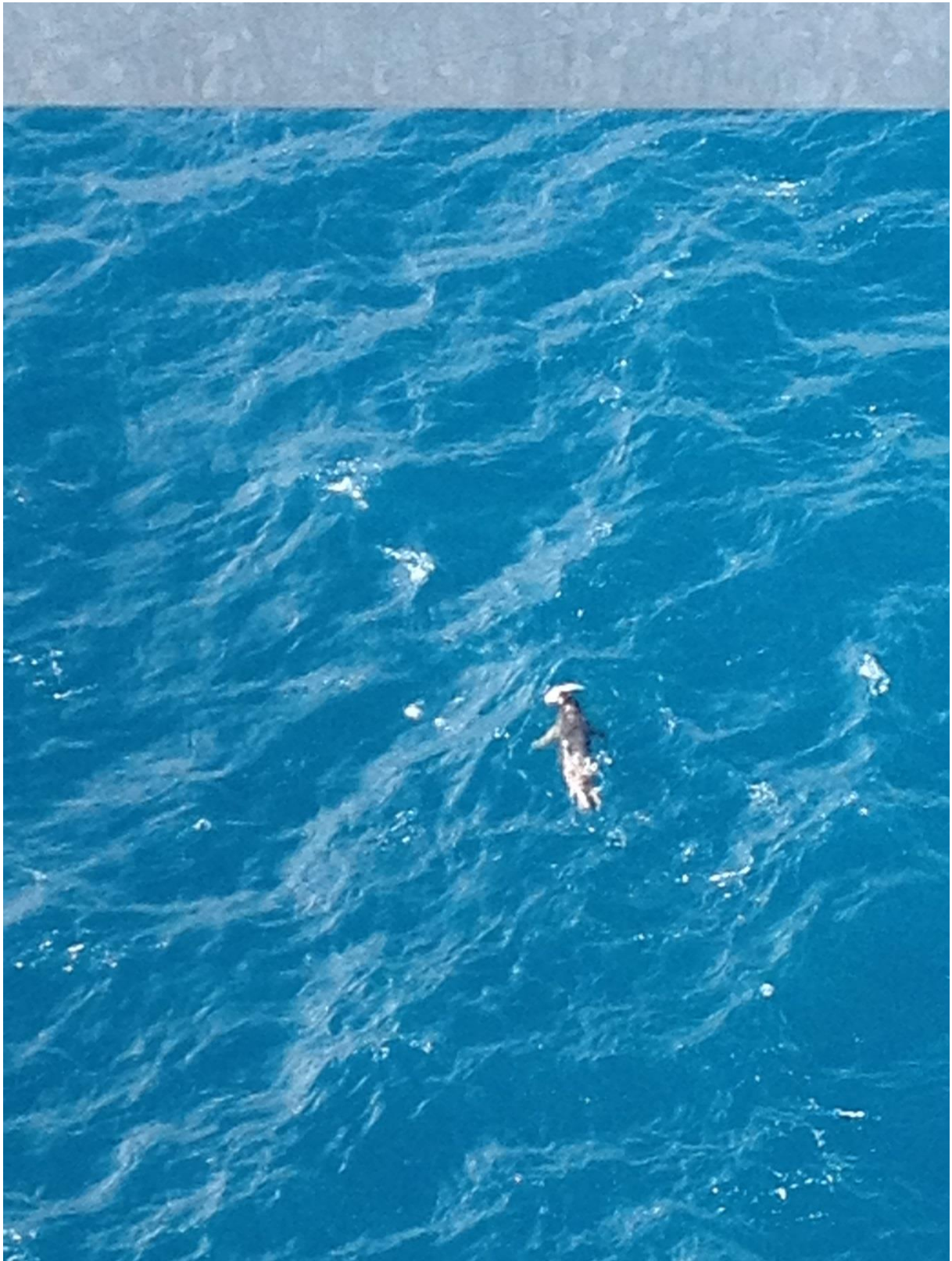
<p>3.1 Education and Awareness Raising Studies;</p> <p>3.1.1 Meetings for the education and awareness raising for local people and students will be held. Brochures, posters and handouts will be prepared and distributed in the meetings.</p> <p>3.1.2 Education of fishermen and fisheries personnel.</p> <p>3.1.3 Informative meetings about the biology and ecology of monk seals and research going on about monk seals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational meetings were held around the primary and secondary schools close to the monk seal habitats in 2015. Educational material was supported by visual material like photographs and videos. Also handouts were given to all attendees. Close cooperation with the Ministry of Education was made and 7 schools determined in Anamur, Bozyazı and Aydıncık districts where monk seal population is highest (App. 4). Education program included the threats to monk seal and conservative measures. The schools in Silifke and Erdemli districts will have the same education program by the end of 2015. • An education program was held with the participation of heads of fishermen cooperatives on 07 May 2015. 18 people participated in the meeting. This education program will be repeated once more by the end of 2015. (App 5). • During biopiracy education, Coast Guard Command was informed about monk seal action plan. In these meetings which took place in Mersin Central and Taşucu Boat Commands, 53 personnel were educated. (App 6).
<p>4.1 Monitoring Program</p> <p>4.1.1 To monitor the change in birth and death rates of monk seals.</p> <p>4.1.2 To monitor the threats on monk seal habitats.</p> <p>4.1.3 To monitor the newborns and determining the rate of survival.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phototraps were purchased and started to be set in the caves. After completing the installation, the data will start to flow. Monitoring a long time will result in determining the birth and death rates • By using the report line, the website and the phototraps together, the data gathered will be evaluated in the analysis of threats. • It is activity is being planned at the moment.

Appendix 1. Location of observation points in the port area.



Appendix 2. Photos of a monk seal feeding around the piles of the port. (First monitoring report)







Appendix 3 Monk seal observed around the construction site on 13 March 2015.



Appendix 4 Education given to school children



Appendix 5 Education given to fishermen



Appendix 6 Informative meetings for Coast Guard



- RECEIVED IN MARCH 2015 -

GOVERNMENT REPORT

ON COMPLAINT NO: 2011 / 4: THREAT TO MEDITERRANEAN MONK SEAL IN TURKEY

The population of monk seal in Turkey is estimated to be 100 individuals, 50 of which occurs near the shores of Mersin Province. This makes Mersin Province a very important place for breeding of Mediterranean monk seal. The Action Plan for Mediterranean monk seal was prepared in 2012 and revised in 2014. During the preparation of the action plan, scientists from universities, specialists from NGOs and staff of governmental institutions made important contributions to the plan. Every action presented in the plan included a broad participation and consensus.

As most of the action plans, this plan includes some information about the biology and ecology of the target species. It is emphasized that monk seal is one of the twelve endangered sea mammals in the world. It is also emphasized that the presence of monk seals in a region is an indicator of healthy ecosystems in that region.

Within the title of biology and ecology of monk seal, some information about physiology, habitats, food preference, local and global distribution of monk seals, local and global population level, status and trend is given.

World population of monk seals is estimated to be between 400 – 450 individuals which survived only in Greece, Turkey, Moritania and Madeira Islands. In this action plan, the biggest monk seal population in Turkey was estimated as 50 individuals in Mersin, forming groups of 5-6 animals from Taşucu district of Mersin to Gazipaşa district. There are important habitats for monk seals around Erdemli, Akkum, Taşucu, Kızılliman, Melleç, Kaledran, Façaini, Tisan, Dana Island and Başparmak Island.

11 important habitats were set aside as 1st degree Natural Site. Besides, three areas set aside as 1st degree archeological sites are also important habitats for monk seals. These 14 areas in total are either protected by the Law on Protection of Cultural and Natural Properties, coded 2863 or by Land Hunting Law, coded 4915.

It is also stated in the plan that monk seal is protected in Turkey under Bern and Barcelona Conventions. The plan also mentions about National Monk Seal Committee, which was established after the 1991 meeting about monk seals. Pilot projects were conducted by this committee in Foça and Bodrum. The ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs organizes the meetings of this committee and 17 important monk seal areas were defined throughout Turkey's shores until now.

According to the field work conducted for this action plan, 18 monk seal stations were detected in Mersin Province. These are namely, Boğsak Island, Şahin Kayası, Eğribük Plajı, Güvercin Island, Barbaros bay, Salvataşı bay, Foca (Focini) Cave, Küçük inler, Dana Island, Mavikent yazlık konutları, Tisanönü (Köselelik mevki), Eşek Island, Köpüktaş bay, Büyük Mağara, Yeşilovacık Kaklık deliği, Soğuksu, Bozuklu Mevkii, Muz Bahçesinin Altı, Kızıl Liman ve Mayıs Burnu, Yarık, Mağara, Mağaranın batısı, Lalezarkuyu, Yedidelik Mağarası.

To define the most problematic issues about monk seals, stakeholders were determined first. According to the stakeholder analysis, 20 different stakeholders were identified. Those are, Mersin Governorship, Silifke, Bozyazı, Anamur and Aydıncık Districts' Governorships, Municipalities, Regional Directorate of the Commission on Protection of Cultural and Natural Properties, Mersin Directorate of Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs, Regional Directorates of General Directorate of Forestry, Provincial Directorate of Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock, Provincial Directorate of Ministry of Environment and Urbanization, Coast Guard, Gendarmerie, Regional Directorate of Highways, Provincial Directorate of Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Provincial Directorate of Ministry of Education, Fishing Cooperatives, Fishery Farms, Mersin University, Middle East Technical University – Institution of Marine Sciences, Association of Underwater Research, summerhouse inhabitants, local people.

Then, the most critical issues threatening the Mediterranean monk seals in Mersin region were defined in the plan. We can group some of the threats as follows:

- 1- Habitat loss: Construction of summerhouses, construction of roads, increasing of touristic places, building of docks speed up the destruction of habitats. Specifically;
Antalya – Mersin Highway, Construction of hotels between Mersin –Silifke, Construction of a new dock close to Yeşilovacık, Construction of Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant, construction of Marina in Aydıncık
- 2- Deliberate or unintentional killing: These do not have large scale impacts, only a few solitary cases seen recently.
- 3- Human activities and level of noise: Even in the most isolated places, there are people fishing by fishing lines or by harpoons. Water sports are another source of disturbance for monk seals. Daily boat tours and campers are still other sources.

Having defined the threats, the action plan seeks some ways to decrease the pressure on monk seals. The activities in the action plan are categorized in four main groups.

- Inventory study
- Conservation measures
- Education and raising awareness
- Monitoring

The basic activities of the action plan is given below:

Program 1 - Inventory Studies							
Action	Responsible Institution	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Cooperation
Inventory of Caves							
Inventory of caves, defining cave as resting or breeding	Prov. Dir. Nat. Con. Nat. Par.		X				AUR, METU-IMS
Defining threats on caves	Prov. Dir. Nat. Con. Nat. Par.		X				AUR, METU-IMS
Inventory of population							
Number of individuals, sex ratio, rate of birth	Prov. Dir. Nat. Con. Nat. Par.		X				AUR, METU-IMS
Integration of these data into existing database	Prov. Dir. Nat. Con. Nat. Par.		X	X	X	X	AUR
Program 2 – Conservation Measures							
Conservation of Habitats							
Informing field users on habitats of monk seals	Prov. Dir. Nat. Con. Nat. Par.	X	X	X	X	X	Several
Hanging informative sheets around important caves	Prov. Dir. Nat. Con. Nat. Par.		X			X	Several
Making legal regulations where necessary, to prevent habitat loss	Prov. Dir. Nat. Con. Nat. Par.						All
Informing related institutions about Akkum cave	Prov. Dir. Nat. Con. Nat. Par.	X	X				P.D. Env. Urb.
Installing protective nets around cages in fishing farms	Prov. Dir. Nat. Con. Nat. Par.	X	X	X	X	X	P.D. Food, Agr.
To create standarts for noise level around monk seal caves	Prov. Dir. Nat. Con. Nat. Par.	X	X	X	X	X	P.D. Env. Urb
Determining a safe route for boats in Aydıncık marina	Prov. Dir. Nat. Con. Nat. Par.	X	X				AUR, Min. Seas
Conservation of Species							
To create a network for dead, injured and sick monk seals	Prov. Dir. Nat. Con. Nat. Par.	X	X	X	X	X	Env, Coast G
To make regulations on speed and travel limits of boats	Prov. Dir. Nat. Con. Nat. Par.	X	X				
To educate veterinarians about caring of injured monk seals	Prov. Dir. Nat. Con. Nat. Par.		X	X			AUR, METU-IMS
Program 3- Education and Raising Awareness							
Holding meetings for local people and students, distributing posters	Prov. Dir. Nat. Con. Nat. Par.	X	X	X	X	X	Several
Educating fishermen and fishing farm employees	Prov. Dir. Nat. Con. Nat. Par.	X	X	X	X	X	Several
Informing other stakeholders about the studies conducted	Prov. Dir. Nat. Con. Nat. Par.	X	X	X	X	X	Several
Program 4- Monitoring							
To monitor the change in the rate of birth and death of monk seal	Prov. Dir. Nat. Con. Nat. Par.	X	X	X	X	X	METU-IMS
To monitor the level of threats	Prov. Dir. Nat. Con. Nat. Par.	X	X	X	X	X	METU-IMS, AUR
To monitor the juveniles and their survival rate	Prov. Dir. Nat. Con. Nat. Par.	X	X	X	X	X	METU - IMS

In 2014, the following activities were done:

In fourth activity of this program, it is stated that necessary measures should be taken to protect the cave in Akkum. The provincial directorate of Culture and Tourism has been informed about the importance of this site.

The feasible localities for establishing fishing farms were discussed with the Provincial Directorate of Food, Agriculture and Livestock and they are limited to a few areas. At the same meeting, it has been made mandatory for fishing farms to cover around their fishing farms with protective nets to prevent monk seal attacks.

An informative meeting was held in 30.12.2014 in the Provincial Directorate of forestry and Water Affair in coordination with METU-IMS, to raise awareness on monk seals. Municipalities, fishing cooperatives and governmental institutions attended this meeting.

In close cooperation with the Provincial Directorate of Environment and Urbanization, it was decided to request scientific reports about noise pollution of some activities planned in close proximity to monk seal habitats.

In the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks, a new proposal was accepted to prepare a new regulation on monk seals and it will start in 2015.

Fishermen and student education programs have been prepared for the implementation in 2015 with the help of Coast Guard and METU-IMS.

To create a network for informing related institutions in case of finding a dead, injured or sick monk seal: A calling center was created for this, and also there are some studies to prepare website and information material.

Monitoring studies were conducted with the cooperation of METU-IMS.

In 2015, following activities are planned:

Photo-traps will be installed in all known caves. Cave and population inventory will be done and birth and death rates and also threats will be determined.

A website will be created for notices and communication.

Education studies will be conducted in schools, also for fishermen and local people. Informational material will be published for those.

Informative sheets will be hung around important nests.

A safe route will be determined for boats in Aydıncık Marina.

Burak TATAR
Wildlife Biologist
Department of Wildlife Management

**ORAL STATEMENT MADE BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF TURKEY AT THE
34TH STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING ON COMPLAINT NO 2011/4: THREAT
TO THE MEDITARRENEAN MONK SEAL**

As it was stated in the 32nd Standing Committee meeting, this projects' Environmental Impact Assessment was done in 2008. EIA report included an "ecosystem evaluation report" which was conducted by three Professors from Ankara University. As required by the ecosystem evaluation report, the construction company made some commitments in the EIA report. One of those commitments was to suspend construction activities during the breeding season of monk seal, which is between September and January. So after the construction work started, it was suspended two times between these dates.

Another commitment of the company was to work in close cooperation with academic staff to monitor the monk seal activity. We have got two monitoring reports since then, which covers a three month monitoring period in the whelping season. There are six observation points used in the monitoring of monk seal activity, as well as video-traps. The young seal found dead on February 28 is the result of amateur fishing activities around the region.

In the national action plan for the protection of Mediterranean monk seal in Turkey, 17 important breeding sites are defined on Turkey's coasts. 5 of them are in the above mentioned Mersin province. Since Mersin is an important city for the protection of monk seal, we launched a project in 2012 for the preparation of a local action plan. This action plan was completed in a short period with the existing information on monk seals. We compiled all the data we obtained from NGOs, universities (including the complainant), local people, fisherman, fishery cooperatives, local traders, hotel owners, captains of blue cruises etc. The action plan has a five year implementation period. Basically it has four program of activities: Monitoring program, conservation program, education program and inspection program. The activities were prioritized to implement in five years' time, and the responsible institutions and indicators of success were determined for all of the activities.

Finally, I would like to remind that this file is still under consideration of a Turkish National Court. As new information arrived only yesterday, we couldn't inform the Bureau earlier. The court requested expert opinion and 5 professors prepared a report two months ago, which was again objected by the complainant. We are expecting the court's decision in a short time.

Therefore, The Turkish Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs is closely examining the progress, doing whatever possible to rescue the populations and we will send all relevant information to the Secretariat as soon as the Turkish Justice Authorities reaches a final decision.