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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

32nd meeting
Strasbourg, 27-30 November 2012

Complaint in stand-by

**SEA TURTLE MORTALITY IN THE BRITISH
SOVEREIGN BASE AREAS (SBAs)
OF EPISKOPI AND AKROTIRI (CYPRUS)**

REPORT BY THE NGO

*Document prepared by
MEDASSET*

Marine Turtle Conservation in the Mediterranean

Sea turtle mortality in the British Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) of Episkopi and Akrotiri (Cyprus)

UPDATE REPORT BY THE NGOS

4th March 2012

Document presented by
the Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles (MEDASSET) & Episkopi Turtle Watch

for the 32nd Standing Committee Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention)
1st Meeting of the Bureau

Following a) the complaint submitted on 16 August 2010 for the 30th Standing Committee Meeting (T-PVS (2010) 16E); b) the information note submitted to the Bureau Meeting on 8 March 2011 ([T-PVS/Files \(2011\) 5E](#)); and c) the update report submitted to the Bureau Meeting on 30th August 2011 ([T-PVS/Files \(2011\) 22E](#)) we hereby present a summary of the situation during September 2011 – February 2012.

SEA TURTLE DEATHS

Since the last update report in 31 August 2011, Episkopi Turtle Watch (ETW) has recorded seven further sea turtle fatalities in Episkopi. These are summarised below:

Date	Location ¹	Species	Life stage	Sex	Cause of death/visible injuries
05/09/11	Tunnel	Ch. mydas	Adult	Male	Severe flipper injuries (Fig 5)
13/09/11	Tunnel	Ch. mydas	Juvenile	n/a	No visible injuries
07/11/11	Curium	Ch. mydas	Juvenile	n/a	Severe propeller cuts
08/12/11	Tunnel	Ch. mydas	Adult	Male	Severe propeller cuts (Fig. 4)
13/01/12	Zapalo	Caretta c	Adult	n/a	Deliberate head injury, flipper tears (Fig. 3)
14/01/12	Curium	Ch. mydas	Adult	Female	Deliberate head injury, flipper tears
28/02/12	Tunnel	Caretta c	Adult	Male	Throat slit. Flipper tears.(Fig. 2)

Therefore, the total number of deaths recorded in 2011 is 25. Whilst this reduction from the 33 deaths recorded in 2010 might seem encouraging the following points should be taken into consideration:

1. For the fourth consecutive year a record number (22) of *Chelonia mydas* died in the area during 2011, three of which were adult turtles and nine were juveniles close to adult size. The average size of the dead sea turtles has been increasing each year since 2008.
2. In 2011 there was virtually no fishing by boat in the area until mid May due to the silting up of Zapalo Harbour during winter. There were zero turtle casualties during that period. Turtle deaths resumed less than one week after the resumption of fishing from Zapalo harbour. The road leading to Zapalo Harbour, which was closed by the SBA Chief Officer several years ago due to safety problems, has yet to be sealed by the SBA, despite the Chief Officer's agreement to this measure in September 2011.
3. From January 1st 2012 until February 29th 2012, three deaths have already been recorded (equivalent period 2008=0, 2009=2, 2010=0, 2011=0). All have been deliberate killings.

Additionally, strandings of five turtles on beaches adjoining Episkopi have been reported to ETW in 2012 (2 at Avdimou, 2 at Lady's Mile, 1 at Akrotiri¹). ETW did not attend these strandings but the information was passed on to the Sovereign Base Area (SBA) Environment Department which is responsible for the above beaches.

¹ See Fig.1 for Map

VIOLATIONS OF FISHING REGULATIONS

No alterations have been made to fishing regulations in the area since 31 August 2011. From 1 June to 30 September there is a 5m depth restriction on setting nets. One boat violating regulations near Zapalo harbour was reported by ETW in September 2011; however bad weather conditions and lack of available human resources at the time made it impossible for SBA Customs officials to apprehend the offender (officers are required to catch the boats while committing a violation in order to take action). Customs took a description of the boat and undertook to try to monitor its' activities in the future.

Under current legislation, for the period 1 October to 31 May artisanal fishing boats effectively operate without restriction in the area; hence there are no violations to report during this period.

CO-OPERATION WITH SBA ADMINISTRATION

During September 2011 – February 2012:

1. No meetings to address the mortality issue have taken place between ETW, the SBA or the Republic of Cyprus (RoC). MEDASSET requested a meeting with the SBA on 5 January 2012 but received no response. This is the 5th request that has been made since December 2010. No joint meeting has ever taken place.
2. The SBA Environment Team seems to have avoided communication with the ETW team; the sole communication by the Environment Team in response to ETW's communications has been via SMS messages regarding the disposal of dead sea turtles.
3. The report on the 2010-11 population survey was very recently posted on the SBAA Environment Department website. The level of communication is such that, despite numerous requests since the survey's completion, the SBA did not inform us of its availability nor were we consulted prior to the report's finalisation despite the fact that we are mentioned as contributors. This does not allow us to comment on the document and the survey results in the present report submitted for the 32nd Standing Committee Meeting. Detailed comments on the document will be provided shortly, reiterating our concerns regarding a) the survey methodology, which were also raised in 2010 during the methodology design and in the T-PVS/File (2011) 22; and b) the lack of collaboration with the NGOs during the survey.

CONCLUSIONS

Sea turtle mortality in the British Sovereign Base Areas has yet to be resolved effectively through management and conservation measures. Lack of constructive cooperation between the NGOs and the SBA authorities cannot be attributed to a lack of willingness by the NGOs.

Both the UK and RoC have demonstrated on previous occasions their commitment to sea turtle conservation and research. DEFRA supports the protection and conservation of sea turtles in several UK overseas territories; we request that the case of the Episkopi and Akrotiri SBA is urgently dealt with equal care and support.

Given the adversely high numbers of turtle deaths in the area for the fourth consecutive year, we request that this case be kept under close scrutiny and be included in the 2012 Standing Committee Agenda for discussion.

We further request the Standing Committee to encourage:

1. SBA authorities to use their regulatory and legislative powers to control fishing in designated areas.
2. That while education of fishermen is crucial, stricter measures against repeatedly offending fishermen, including withdrawal of their license, should be implemented.
3. Cooperation on behalf of the SBA, DEFRA and the RoC with the NGOs with a view to establishing a commonly accepted population survey methodology and conclusions, as well as organising meetings to promote jointly acceptable solutions and measures to tackle the high mortality problem.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

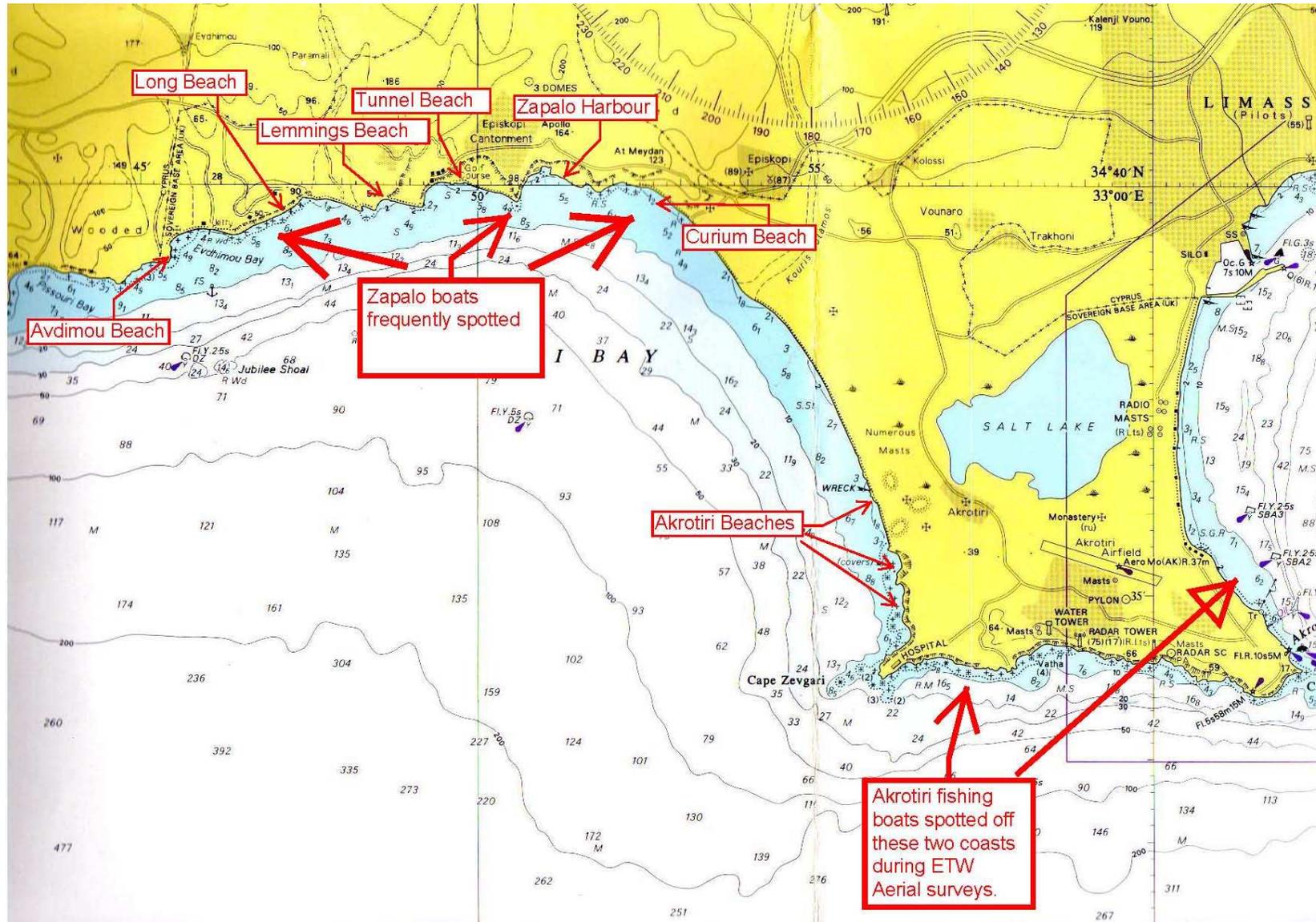


Fig. 1. Area Map and known fishing spots for boats moored at Zapalo and Akrotiri-based fishermen.



Fig. 2. 28 February 2012. Dead adult male *Caretta caretta* with deliberately cut throat



Fig.3. 13 January 2012. Dead adult *Caretta caretta* with deliberate head wound.



Fig. 4. 8 December 2011. Dead adult male *Chelonia mydas* with severe propeller injuries



Fig. 5. 5 September 2011. Dead adult male *Chelonia mydas* with broken and torn flippers