



United Nations Environment Programme

Mediterranean Action Plan

Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas



# **REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE CONSERVATION OF MONK SEALS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN (2014-2019)**



Photo: Kirac SAD AFAG

**RAC/SPA - 2014**

Note:

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Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (RAC/SPA)  
Boulevard du Leader Yasser Arafat  
B.P. 337 - 1080 Tunis Cedex - Tunisia  
E-mail: [car-asp@rac-spa.org](mailto:car-asp@rac-spa.org)

The original version of this document was prepared for the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (RAC/SPA) by:  
Giuseppe Notarbartolo di Sciara,  
Tethys Research Institute, Milano, Italy  
E-mail: [[giuseppe@disciara.net](mailto:giuseppe@disciara.net)]

## **1.1. The Strategy**

### **1.1.1. Vision**

“Over the next two decades, the ecological recovery of monk seals in the Mediterranean will deem to have occurred, when multiple colonies have become established within all major habitats of their historic range, interacting in ecologically significant ways with the fullest possible set of other species, and inspiring and connecting human cultures”.

### **1.1.2. Goals**

**Goal 1.** Mediterranean Range States implement this Strategy in pursuance of the Vision, through the expeditious development and adoption of appropriate national policies and administrative frameworks, and with the effective, coordinated support from relevant international organisations and civil society.

**Goal 2.** Monk seal breeding nuclei in sites located in “Group A” countries are effectively protected from deliberate killings and habitat degradation, so that seal numbers in such sites increase and seals are able to disperse to and re-colonise the surrounding areas.

**Goal 3.** Monk seal presence in sites where they are occasionally seen today in “Group B” countries is permanently established, and breeding resumes. “Group B” countries are upgraded to “Group A”.

**Goal 4.** Monk seal presence is again reported in the species’ historical habitat in “Group C” countries, and these “Group C” countries are upgraded to “Group B”. Once all “Group C” countries are upgraded, Group C is deleted.



### 1.1.3. Goal Targets, Objectives and Objective Targets

**Goal 1. Mediterranean Range States implement this Strategy in pursuance of the Vision, through the expeditious development and adoption of appropriate national policies and administrative frameworks, and with the effective, coordinated support from relevant international organisations and civil society.**

**Goal Target 1.1.** A framework for the implementation of the Mediterranean Monk Seal Conservation Strategy is established by the Mediterranean Range States. The framework will include the establishment of a Monk Seal Task Force (MSTF) and the selection of a Monk Seal Conservation Officer (MSCO).

**Objective 1.1.1.** Mediterranean Range States establish a **Monk Seal Task Force (MSTF)** tasked to recommend actions a) for the implementation of the Strategy, and b) to update, adapt and improve the Strategy itself (e.g., by defining the Actions needed to attain the different Objective Targets). The MSTF is composed by a small (ideally,  $\leq 10$ ) group of monk seal conservation experts, whom the Range States designate, selected amongst national and international monk seal conservation experts. The MSTF will include ecological as well as social and economical expertise. The MSTF functioning is supported by the RAC/SPA, and may benefit from the technical support of IUCN's Pinniped Specialist Group, the GFCM and other relevant international organisations.

**Objective Target 1.1.1.1.** MSTF TOR adopted, Task Force established by March 2014. The Task Force meets at least once a year to review the status of monk seals in the region, and to support the implementation of the appropriate Actions foreseen in the Strategy.

**Objective Target 1.1.1.2.** First meeting of MSTF in June 2014. Recommendations adopted are submitted to Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention through the SPA Focal Points<sup>8</sup>.

**Objective Target 1.1.1.3.** MSTF activities are harmonised with efforts by UNEP-MAP within the Ecosystem Approach process for the attainment of Good Environmental Status in the Mediterranean, i.e., to attain Ecological Objective EO1 "Biodiversity" and Operational Objectives 1.1 ("Species distribution is maintained"), 1.2 ("Population size of selected species is maintained"), 1.3 ("Population condition of selected species is maintained"), 1.4 ("Key coastal and marine habitats are not being lost"), as far as monk seals are concerned.

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<sup>8</sup> As prescribed in Art. 31 of the Action Plan (UNEP-MAP-RAC/SPA, 2003a).

**Objective 1.1.2.** A **Monk Seal Conservation Officer (MSCO)** is selected by the Range States from within the MSTF, tasked of coordinating the MSTF work and of supporting the conservation activities implemented by Range States and concerned international organisations through the implementation of this Strategy<sup>9</sup>.

**Objective Target 1.1.2.1.** TOR for MSCO adopted, MSCO engaged by March 2014.

**Objective 1.1.3.** The Parties to the Barcelona Convention ensure that the MSTF and the activities it recommends are supported by adequate resources.

**Objective Target 1.1.3.1.** The Parties to the Barcelona Convention adopt a resolution to support the MSTF functioning.

**Objective 1.1.4.** The Parties to the Barcelona Convention ensure that the activities that the MSTF recommends, insofar as it is possible, are implemented.

**Objective Target 1.1.4.1.** The Parties to the Barcelona Convention adopt resolutions in support of specific MSTF recommendations concerning the implementation of this Strategy.

**Goal Target 1.2.** Based on this Strategy, the MSTF provides support to Mediterranean Range States in the development and implementation of specific conservation actions having a regional scope.

**Objective 1.2.1.** A contingency plan for single disastrous events (e.g., a lethal epizootic outbreak, a massive oil spill within monk seal critical habitat), and for emergency conditions which may derive from catastrophic environmental change, is developed by the MSTF in cooperation with equivalent bodies dealing with the conservation of Mediterranean monk seals in the Atlantic, with the conservation of cetaceans in the Mediterranean (i.e., within the ACCOBAMS framework), and with the appropriate bodies within the “Barcelona System” (e.g., REMPEC). The contingency plan will include the collection and safe storage of Mediterranean monk seal germplasm which may support in the future the recovery of the species should it become extinct.

**Objective Target 1.2.1.1.** Contingency plan developed by the MSTF in 2014, and adopted by the subsequent Barcelona Convention CoP.

**Objective 1.2.2.** Capacity building and awareness activities are planned by the MSTF, and promoted in monk seal Ranges States so that monk seal protection and recovery is effectively embraced at the national level. This will include the preparation of a dedicated

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<sup>9</sup> As prescribed in Art. 30 of the Action Plan (UNEP-MAP-RAC/SPA, 2003a).

web site and the regular issuing and widely distributed monk seal information newsletter in an adequate number of different languages.

**Objective Target 1.2.2.1.** Capacity building: the main groups of stakeholders in monk seal conservation are identified by the MSTF, tailored to each different monk seal Range State (with first priority given to “Group A Countries” and second priority given to “Group B Countries”), and training courses are prepared and planned (see Goal Targets 2.2. and 3.8). Preferably, training events will be developed *in situ* at selected locations having special relevance to monk seal conservation, in collaboration with the local groups, and will be followed by a constant “advice service” or accompanying process to ensure that full and long-lasting advantage derives from the effort.

**Objective Target 1.2.2.2.** In order to facilitate collaboration and communication amongst monk seal conservation experts throughout the region, the MSTF promotes periodical workshops on best practices of monk seal monitoring and conservation techniques, preferably taking advantage of other meetings being periodically organised (e.g., CIESM Congresses, ECS Annual meetings). Proceedings are edited and widely diffused (e.g., by pdf through the Internet) in formats that will serve as “best practice guidelines”.

**Objective Target 1.2.2.3.** Awareness actions are promoted by the MSTF, with first priority given to “Group A Countries” (with the exception of Greece) and second priority given to “Group B Countries”, in cooperation with local groups, targeting special-interest stakeholders such as fishermen and local coastal communities. Awareness actions, preferably supported through national fundraising efforts, could be modelled (*mutatis mutandis*) on the experience of the EC-funded “Thalassa” LIFE+ Information Communication project carried out in Greece in 2010-2013.

**Objective Target 1.2.2.4.** A website dedicated to monk seal conservation and information at the regional level is prepared by RAC/SPA in close collaboration with “The Monachus Guardian” and posted online by the end of 2014.

**Objective Target 1.2.2.5.** Monk seal newsletter issued twice a year by RAC/SPA in close collaboration with “The Monachus Guardian”, starting in 2014.

**Objective 1.2.3.** Monk seal rescue and rehabilitation programmes are planned by the MSTF and supported in Range States (with priority given to “Group A” countries) through capacity building and structural and operational funding.

**Objective Target 1.2.3.1.** The “National Rescue and Information Network” (RINT) in Greece is supported and strengthened. The construction and operation of a state-of-the-art rehabilitation facility (operational by 2015) is supported.

**Objective Target 1.2.3.2.** The national rescue and rehabilitation network called AFBKA, to be enhanced and further supported in Turkey, is operational by August 2014. Capacity building programmes with international expert support facilitated by the MSTF are implemented in 2015.

**Objective Target 1.2.3.3.** A national rescue and rehabilitation network is established and supported in Cyprus. Capacity building programmes with international expert support facilitated by the MSTF are implemented in 2015. Arrangements are made for a) the local rescue and release of seals in need of minor support, and b) the transfer of seals needing major support to the rehabilitation facility in Greece or in Turkey.

**Objective 1.2.4.** Monitoring of monk seal distribution and abundance, as well as advances in knowledge important for monk seal conservation, are promoted and supported by the MSTF through training, workshops and the facilitation of research and monitoring programmes. The monitoring process is made to coincide with the similar monitoring requirements within the framework of the Ecosystem Approach process by UNEP-MAP, and (where appropriate) with the Marine Framework Strategy Directive of the EC.

**Objective Target 1.2.4.1.** MSTF supports the completion of monk seal breeding site inventories in “Group A Countries” by 2016.

**Objective Target 1.2.4.2.** MSTF supports the yearly monitoring of monk seal population parameters (e.g., pup production) in breeding sites in “Group A Countries”, starting in 2014.

**Objective Target 1.2.4.3.** MSTF supports the regular monitoring of region-wide monk seal demographic parameters, such as mortality (levels and causes) and birth rates, starting in 2014.



**Goal 2. Monk seal breeding nuclei in sites located in “Group A” countries are effectively protected from deliberate killings and habitat degradation, so that seal numbers in such sites increase and seals are able to disperse to and re-colonise the surrounding areas.**

**Goal Target 2.1.** Maintain and secure monk seal presence in important monk seal locations, including: a) Greek Ionian islands (Lefkada, Kefallinia, Ithaca, Zakynthos, and surrounding islets and seas); b) Northern Sporades; c) Gyaros; d) Kimolos and Polyaiagos; e) Karpathos-Saria; f) Turkish Aegean and Mediterranean coasts; g) Cyprus. Breeding nuclei in the locations listed above are effectively protected from deliberate killings and habitat degradation, so that seal numbers in such sites increase and young seals are able to disperse and re-colonise the surrounding areas.

**Objective 2.1.1.** Current legislation prohibiting to carry firearms and explosives aboard fishing vessels in Greece, Turkey, Cyprus is enforced, with a special attention in locations listed in Goal Target 2.1.

**Objective Target 2.1.1.1.** Compliance with existing laws concerning firearms and explosives aboard fishing vessels in Greece, Turkey, Cyprus is routinely enforced everywhere, to come into effect with immediate urgency. Appropriate statistics of infringements are kept and publicized. Infringements are prosecuted with penalties appropriate to address the destruction of a critically endangered, specially protected species. Current illegal fishing practices are eradicated.

**Objective 2.1.2.** Locations listed in Goal Target 2.1, and other equally important locations that may be eventually discovered in the future, are geographically delimited and legally protected/managed.

**Objective Target 2.1.2.1.** A monk seal MPA (or an MPA network) encompassing the most important monk seal habitat in the area is formally established in the Greek Ionian islands by 2014.

**Objective Target 2.1.2.2.** The current Natura 2000 site around the island of Gyaros is formally established as a monk seal protected area by 2014.

**Objective Target 2.1.2.3.** A monk seal MPA is formally established in Kimolos - Polyaigos by 2013.

**Objective Target 2.1.2.4.** A monk seal MPA is formally established in Karpathos - Saria by 2013<sup>10</sup>.

**Objective Target 2.1.2.5.** Monk seal MPAs are designated along the Aegean and Mediterranean coastline of Turkey by 2014, to protect monk seal critical habitat as determined and mapped by the Turkish National Monk Seal Committee.

**Objective Target 2.1.2.6.** A monk seal MPA is designated in Cyprus where suitable critical monk seal critical habitat is identified, and established by 2015.

**Objective 2.1.3.** Areas in locations listed under Goal Target 2.1 are effectively protected through a) appropriate management actions, and b) the keen involvement of the local communities, which will both ensure the good conservation status of monk seals found there. A management framework is in place and implemented, defining the spatial, temporal and specific measures needed in the species' critical habitats (e.g., regulating access to caves), thereby affording effective protection to haul out and pupping sites.

**Objective Target 2.1.3.1.** Until formal protection of the areas listed under Goal Target 2.1 is established and enforced, patrolling of the most important haul out and

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<sup>10</sup> Greece has already established the protected area Management Body in Karpathos in 2007, however the MPA has not been legally declared yet.



pupping locations and caves is organised at least during the summer and breeding season, starting in 2014. Patrolling can be done by volunteers, well-trained and possibly local, who will be performing awareness actions *in situ*, as well as solicit the intervention of law enforcers in case of need.

**Objective Target 2.1.3.2.** All monk seal MPAs established under Objective 2.1.2, as well as the National Marine Park of Alonissos – Northern Sporades, are endowed with an operant Management Body and a management plan which is adaptive, ecosystem-based and fully implemented by 2014.

**Objective Target 2.1.3.3.** Management in monk seal MPAs established under Objective 2.1.2, as well as the National Marine Park of Alonissos – Northern Sporades, is conducted in a participatory fashion, with the full involvement of local artisanal fishermen and local communities at large, and in cooperation with the fisheries sectors (e.g., see GFCM 2011). All proposals and decisions aiming at establishing or modifying conservation and protection measures must be based on sound and indisputable scientific data and evidence. Elements of participatory approach will include awareness campaigns as well as the experimentation/adoption of innovative mechanisms to address opportunity costs, damage mitigation and the generation of alternative sources of income (e.g., ecotourism).

**Goal Target 2.2.** Implementation of Goal Target 2.1. is enabled through appropriate capacity building activities.

**Objective 2.2.1.** Training sessions are organised in areas relevant to locations listed in Goal Target 2.1, with the support of the MSTF (see Objective Target 1.2.2.1). Training will concentrate, at least initially, on mitigating the main threats to monk seals (deliberate killing, habitat degradation, and accidental entanglement), and will target stakeholders identified by the MSTF (e.g., fishermen, tourist operators, enforcement officers, judges). Training will be developed together with the local groups, and will be followed by a constant “advice service” or accompanying process to ensure that full advantage is taken from the effort.

**Goal 3. Monk seal presence in sites where they are occasionally seen today in “Group B” countries is permanently established, and breeding resumes. “Group B” countries are upgraded to “Group A”.**

Monk seal presence in “Group B” countries must be verified with appropriate methods so as to define the actual species’ use of the coastal seas and identify the areas in which priority monitoring, awareness and protection actions need to be carried out (see Objective 1.2.4). This implies that priority areas of usage be identified thorough sighting collection campaigns, habitat surveys in areas of hotspot sightings, and where the coastal habitat is most pristine (which implies analysis of coastal habitat characteristics and their distribution in each nation), followed by *in situ* monitoring to assess the eventual degree of habitat use by monk seals. Sites with repeated use and with highest numbers of monk seal sightings must be evaluated in terms of pressures and risks. Awareness activities to be carried out in each site will depend on the type of use of the coasts by the species, the degree of the pressures

impinging on each site, and the type of risks involved depending on what will appear to be the type of habitat use by the monk seals.

**Goal Target 3.1.** Monk seal presence in Italy, and in particular in the Egadi Islands, in locations around Sardinia, and in the Tuscan Archipelago, is permanently established, and monk seal breeding resumes.

**Objective 3.1.1.** Monitoring of monk seal distribution, abundance and behaviour (including eventual pup production) is continued in the Egadi islands.

**Objective Target 3.1.1.1.** Non-invasive and scientifically sound monitoring technologies, applied to caves in appropriate locations within the Egadi Islands MPA, is continued and enhanced.

**Objective Target 3.1.1.2.** A programme involving local fishermen in the monitoring programme around the Egadi Islands MPA (also targeted at increasing their awareness), is continued and enhanced.

**Objective 3.1.2.** Regular monitoring of monk seal presence and awareness actions are conducted in areas historically containing monk seal habitat in Sardinia.

**Objective 3.1.3.** Regular monitoring of monk seal presence and awareness actions are conducted in areas historically containing monk seal habitat in the Tuscan Archipelago.

**Goal Target 3.2.** Monk seal presence in Croatia, and in particular in specific localities of the Dalmatian archipelago and southern Istria, is permanently established, and monk seal breeding resumes.

**Objective 3.1.3.** Monk seal ecology and behaviour (including eventual pup production) is monitored in selected locations of the Dalmatian Archipelago and of the Istria Peninsula, and awareness action is conducted in the area.

**Objective Target 3.1.3.1.** Non-invasive and scientifically sound monitoring technologies are applied to caves in Istria and selected Dalmatian islands, starting in 2014.

**Objective Target 3.1.3.2.** Awareness actions are conducted in Croatia, targeting local residents and visitors.

**Goal Target 3.3.** Monk seal presence in Libya and nearby western Egypt is confirmed and permanently established, and monk seal breeding is reported.

**Objective 3.3.1.** Monk seal ecology and behaviour (including eventual pup production) is monitored in Libya (Cyrenaica) and nearby Egyptian coast (from the border, including Sallum MPA, to Marsa Matrouh).

**Objective Target 3.3.1.1.** Full survey of monk seal presence and awareness actions organised in Cyrenaica by 2015.

**Objective Target 3.3.1.2.** Full survey of monk seal presence and awareness actions organised in Egypt (from the border, including Sallum MPA, to Marsa Matrouh) by 2015.

**Goal Target 3.4.** Monk seal presence in the Balearic Islands, Spain, is confirmed and permanently established.

**Objective 3.4.1.** A reporting scheme to detect occasional monk seal presence and alert authorities is implemented; awareness actions are conducted around the Balearic Islands, Spain.

**Goal Target 3.5.** Monk seal presence in Albania is confirmed and permanently established.

**Objective 3.5.1.** A reporting scheme to detect occasional monk seal presence and alert authorities is implemented along the Albanian coastal zone; awareness actions are conducted in the concerned areas.

**Goal Target 3.6.** Monk seal presence in Syria, Lebanon and Israel is confirmed and permanently established.

**Objective 3.6.1.** A reporting scheme to detect occasional monk seal presence and alert authorities is implemented along the Syrian, Lebanese and Israeli coastal zone; awareness actions are conducted in the concerned areas.

**Goal Target 3.7.** Monk seal continued presence in locations of the Maghreb's Mediterranean coasts and annexed islands, in Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and the Chafarinas Islands (Spain) is confirmed and permanently established.

**Objective 3.7.1.** A reporting scheme to detect occasional monk seal presence and alert authorities is implemented along Maghreb's Mediterranean coasts and annexed islands, in Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and the Chafarinas Islands (Spain); awareness actions are conducted in the concerned areas.

**Goal Target 3.8.** Implementation of Goal Targets 3.1.-3.7. is enabled through appropriate capacity building activities.

**Objective 3.8.1.** Capacity building. Training sessions are organised in areas relevant to locations listed in Goal Target 3.1-3.7, with the support of the MSTF (see Objective Target 1.2.2.1). Training will concentrate, at least initially, on mitigating the main threats to monk seals (deliberate killing, habitat degradation, and accidental entanglements), and will target stakeholders identified by the MSTF (e.g., fishermen, tourist operators, enforcement officers, judges). Training will be developed together with the local groups, and will be followed by a constant “advice service” or accompanying process to ensure that full advantage is taken from the effort.



**Goal 4. Monk seal presence is again reported in the species’ historical habitat in “Group C” countries, and these “Group C” countries are upgraded to “Group B”. Once all “Group C” countries are upgraded, Group C is deleted.**

**Goal Target 4.1.** Monk seal presence is reported again from Corsica and continental France.

**Objective 4.1.1.** Regular monitoring of monk seal presence and awareness actions are conducted in the species’ historical habitat in Corsica and continental France.

**Goal Target 4.2.** Monk seal presence is reported from Montenegro, Bosnia Herzegovina and Slovenia.

**Objective 4.2.1.** Regular monitoring of monk seal presence and awareness actions are conducted in the species’ historical habitat in Montenegro, Bosnia Herzegovina and Slovenia.

**Goal Target 4.3.** Monk seal presence is reported from Malta.

**Objective 4.3.1.** Regular monitoring of monk seal presence and awareness actions are conducted in the species’ historical habitat in Malta.

**Goal Target 4.4.** Implementation of Goal Targets 4.1-4.3. is enabled through appropriate capacity building activities.

**Objective 4.4.1.** Capacity building: training courses are organised in locations listed in Goal Targets 4.1-4.3, with the support of the Monk Seal Task Force (see Objective Target 1.2.2.1).



#### **1.1.4. Revision of the Strategy**

The suggested time horizon of this Strategy is six years, to be concluded in 2018-2019, when a comprehensive review of the Strategy's accomplishments and failures, with a consideration for potential actions to be taken beyond 2019, should be conducted. Such timing also coincides with the process requiring EU Member States to report concerning the Habitats and Marine Strategy Framework Directives, thereby facilitating the implementation of the Strategy's actions by such States.

A mid-term assessment of the implementation results in 2016 is also recommended, to evaluate up-to-date attainment of Goals and Objectives within the Strategy's timeframe and to identify, if needed, moderate adjustments.



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Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (RAC/SPA)  
Boulevard du leader Yasser Arafet, B.P. 337 - 1080 Tunis CEDEX  
TUNISIA  
Tél. : +216 71 206 649 / 485 / 851 - Fax : +216 71 206 490  
E-mail : [car-asp@rac-spa.org](mailto:car-asp@rac-spa.org)  
[www.rac-spa.org](http://www.rac-spa.org)