



## CONSERVATION OF THE MEDITERRANEAN MONK SEAL *Monachus monachus* IN TURKIYE AND THE ROLE OF COASTAL & MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

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The distribution range of Mediterranean monk seal *Monachus monachus* (Hermann, 1779) was covering whole Turkish coasts of approx. 8500 km. with an uncertainty along eastern Turkish Black Sea coasts. Since 1970s, the distribution of the species in the country has been patchy, and today extends mainly along Turkish Aegean and Mediterranean coasts with a total population of around 100 individuals<sup>1</sup>. The species exists very sparsely in the Sea of Marmara and is believed extinct in the Black Sea coasts of Türkiye by the last reliable sighting record in 1997<sup>2</sup>.

Currently, the most prominent threat against the species is habitat degradation due to the coastal development projects including new road constructions and housing. The pup & juvenile deaths due to entanglement to set-nets resulting in drowning and the disturbance of seals in caves by intruding divers & excursion boats locally in tourism zones are other important threats. The deliberate killings of seals by artisanal fishermen have been rarely observed for the last two decades. Therefore, the habitat loss in the wild coasts, as the only irreversible process among all the threats, is regarded as the major threat in the country.

Establishment of MPAs is a pre-requisite for the conservation of the Mediterranean monk seal. However, without integrated management plans, MPA practices will not effectively function for the conservation of the species and its habitat. Integrated Coastal and Marine Management planning, therefore, plays a crucial role for an effective protection. There are 10 SEPAs, 7 NPs, 6 Nature Reserves, 4 Nature Parks, 12 Wildlife Enhancement Areas and 5 Ramsar Sites along Turkish coasts, which constitutes 4% of whole marine areas and around 22% of the coasts in the country. Only a few of these PAs have management plans covering both terrestrial & respective marine zones, however, the rest do not have any or do have only terrestrial zone management plans. In general, management and protection of these diversified PAs are insufficient, while there are successful examples of PA management practices in the country. Establishment criteria for true MPAs should be set up to expand MPAs and ideal ICMM concept be developed, which would also be applied for all the existing PAs in Türkiye. The national background, the know-how and scientific data, is potentially available for setting up establishment criteria and ICMM design and effective management of MPAs, based on the experiences gained.

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<sup>1</sup> Güçlüsoy H, C.O. Kırac, Y. Savaş and N.O. Veryeri. 2004. Status of the Mediterranean Monk Seal, *Monachus monachus* (Hermann, 1779) in the Coastal Waters of Turkey. E.U. Journal of Fisheries & Aquatic Sciences 21 (3-4): 201–210.

<sup>2</sup> Kırac, C.O. 2001. Witnessing the monk seal's extinction in the Black Sea. (In Ed. William M. Johnson, The Monachus Guardian <http://www.monachus-guardian.org/mguard08/08editor.htm>) Vol.4 (2): October 2001. Bern,