

Agenda Item 6.1: Open File

Turkey: Habitat Destruction in Mersin, Anamur Beach



43rd Meeting of the Standing Committee
Bern Convention
27th November – 1st December 2023

IMPORTANCE OF ANAMUR SEA TURTLE NESTING SITE

Slide 2

- 12.7km sea turtle nesting beach
- **2nd most important** sea turtle nesting site **in Turkey** & **4th in the Mediterranean** for the loggerhead turtles₁
 - Nests/yr Average = **733**₂
 - Recent years have recorded 1,000+ nests
- The natural habitat of the creek is also an important area for the **Critically Endangered** Mediterranean subpopulation of the Soft-Shelled Nile Turtles (*Trionyx triunguis*)
 - The entire Mediterranean subpopulation of the Soft-Shelled Nile Turtles is estimated to be **less than 1000** adult individuals



₁ IUCN MTSG report *Sea turtles in the Mediterranean*, 2010; Hochscheid et al. 2018. *Sea Turtles in the Mediterranean Region: MTSG Annual Regional Report*

₂ Hochscheid et al. 2018. *Sea Turtles in the Mediterranean Region: MTSG Annual Regional Report*

LEGISLATIVE PROTECTION OF ANAMUR

- **Recommendation No.66 (1998) on the conservation status of some nesting beaches for marine turtles in Turkey on 4th December 1998.**
 - **Measure No.1** Necessitates **Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs)** to be carried out for projects.
 - **Measure No.4** Assure **inter-ministerial compliance** for marine turtle conservation
 - **Measure No.5** Urgent & stringent measures to **enforce legislation against illegal sand extraction.**
 - **Species Protection** Anamur Beach: To Prohibit sand extraction & Secure remaining unbuilt beach plots against development.
- **Turkish Ministry of Environment & Forestry Circular No:B.18.0.DMP.0.01.03/831.02 Oct 2009**
 - 1st Degree Conservation Areas. (The Protection Zone)
 - (b) Prohibits alteration of the land (digging/filling)
 - (c) No alterations to the sand (removal or additions)
 - (f) The use of lights at night will be prevented and audited by taking necessary measures
 - (g) Requirement of Ministerial permission from Environment & Forestry Ministry for projects

NO PROGRESS SINCE FILE OPENING

- **Violations** of the National legislation (Circular No:B.18.0.DMP.0.01.03/831.02 Oct 2009) to protect the sea turtles and nesting habitat **continue to occur** without any consequence for the perpetrators.
- A new conservation status change circular has been issued, covering the area most densely used for nesting and **further limiting protection** of the beach.
- **Recommendation No.66 (1998)** on the conservation status of nesting beaches for marine turtles in Turkey and specifically Anamur is **not implemented**.
- There is **no communication and collaboration** between the authorities and local NGOs, for the on-going works/ monitoring of the two coastal development projects at Anamur protected sea turtle nesting beach.
- The full rehabilitation of the illegal picnic area at Karaagac has yet to occur, with only **minor actions for rehabilitation** taken. The second phase of the Beach Development Project construction started in September 2022 continued during the 2023 nesting season and the **third phase is expected to start soon**.
- **Illegal sand extraction, vehicles accessing the beach, light and sound pollution, and business expansions** continue to degrade the nesting habitat, and placing the breeding population and hatchlings at risk.

KARAAĞAÇ RESTORATION

- The site has not been fully restored to its natural state.
- Some additional sand was poured on the residues and debris on the Karaagac Beach for the rehabilitation of the picnic area **BUT** no restoration has been attempted to remove the stone wall and reinstate the natural creek bank.
- The natural vegetation is only preserved on the side of the stream which remains in a natural state, as the other side was covered with stones. The stream's water level and width are unsuitable to allow the African Softshell Turtle to live under these conditions.



“RUINOUS” COASTAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT CONTINUES

- The 2nd phase of the Beach Arrangement Project of the Municipality of Anamur was still actively carried out when our on-site survey was performed **in July 2023**. **This situation violates the 2009/10 circular** on sea turtle conservation.
- The recreational areas and facilities which are operational and the ones which are planned within the scope of the project increase the usage pressure on the beach. In the first protection zone, **the intensity of use, the pollution, water flowing from showers, artificial lighting, use of umbrellas and sun loungers** seriously affect sea turtles.
- The **3rd phase** of the Development Project is **expected to be constructed in the western direction this winter**.



“RUINOUS” COASTAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT CONTINUES

- A section of the development project is within the 1st Protection Zone (0-65m from the sea). This is **a clear violation**.



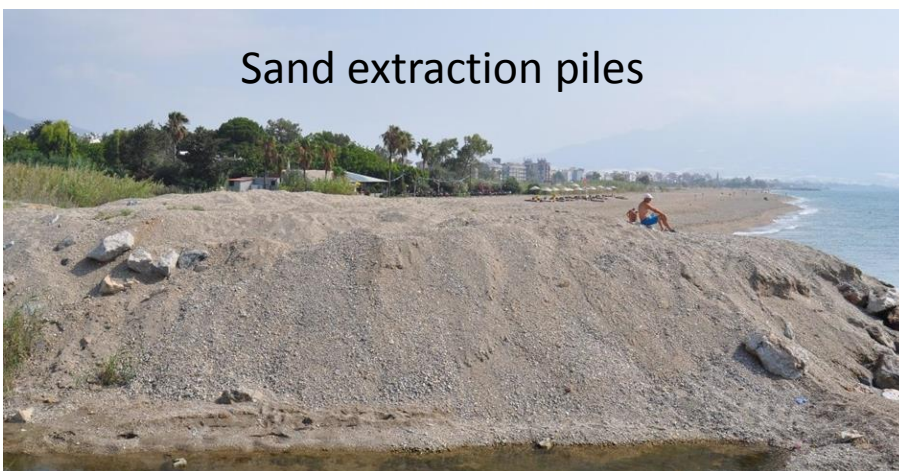
SAND EXTRACTION THREATENS ANAMUR NESTING BEACH

- In violation of National Legislation sand extraction is still evident along the protected nesting beach.
- The authorities are not doing enough to protect the beach and to deter the perpetrators.

Sand was extracted to expand canal



Sand extraction piles



Sand extraction at the Sultan Rivulet , 12 September 2023



EXCESSIVE LIGHT AND SOUND POLLUTION

- Excessive sound and light pollution severely affects sea turtles. The extent of sound and light pollution is **extremely problematic** and is made worse by the Beach Arrangement Project, restaurants, and entertainment venues operating on the beach, fireworks, and street lighting.

Light pollution from a restaurant on the beach



Light and Sound Pollution from the pedestrian road, park and restaurants built under the Beach Arrangement Project.



BUSINESS EXPANSIONS DESTROY the 1st Protection Zone

- Businesses are increasing their occupation on the beach every year, **severely affecting sea turtles**.



Trees, irrigation system, wooden covered walkway,
And beach furniture that is not removed at night,
all within 20 m from the shoreline



New bungalows appear every year

THE 1ST PROTECTION ZONE IS UNDER SEVERE PRESSURE

- **Anthropogenic pressures** severely affect the sea turtle nesting beach of Anamur.



The irony of posting signs to protect the *Caretta caretta*, while completely overrunning the nesting beach.



Beach visitors use the cage that protects the turtle's nest to hang their clothes.

ILLEGAL VEHICLE ACCESS TO THE BEACH IS RAMPANT

- During the survey, illegal vehicle entries were detected in almost all areas. **No measures in place** to restrict beach access!



Vehicle tracks on the nesting area next to nests



Vehicle tracks on the dunes

DRAGON ÇAYI RIVULET RIVERBANK DESTRUCTION

Alteration of the natural riverbank at Dragon Çayi Rivulet destroyed this habitat of the Soft Shell Nile. Further alterations of the riverbank must be stopped!



SOFT SHELL NILE TURTLES (*TRIONYX TRIUNGUIS*) IN DIRE NEED OF PROTECTION

- Previous MEDASSET Reports T-PVS (99) 73 & (98) 59
- Observations of this **critically endangered species**, were recorded in the Dragon Rivulet during the 2023 assessment
- Tracks and nests were observed close to Mamure Castle
- No official monitoring report available



LACK OF MONITORING & PROTECTION MEASURES

- There is **no regular and standard monitoring** study on the Anamur nesting beach. The Nature Conservancy and National Parks have assigned **only one person** for nest counting and caging of the 12+ km length of the beach!
- There is an **urgent need for more staff** as one person is insufficient. Monitoring, conservation, and raising awareness work should be carried out with professional/academic support.



OTHER ALARMING MATTERS

Geothermal Drilling License

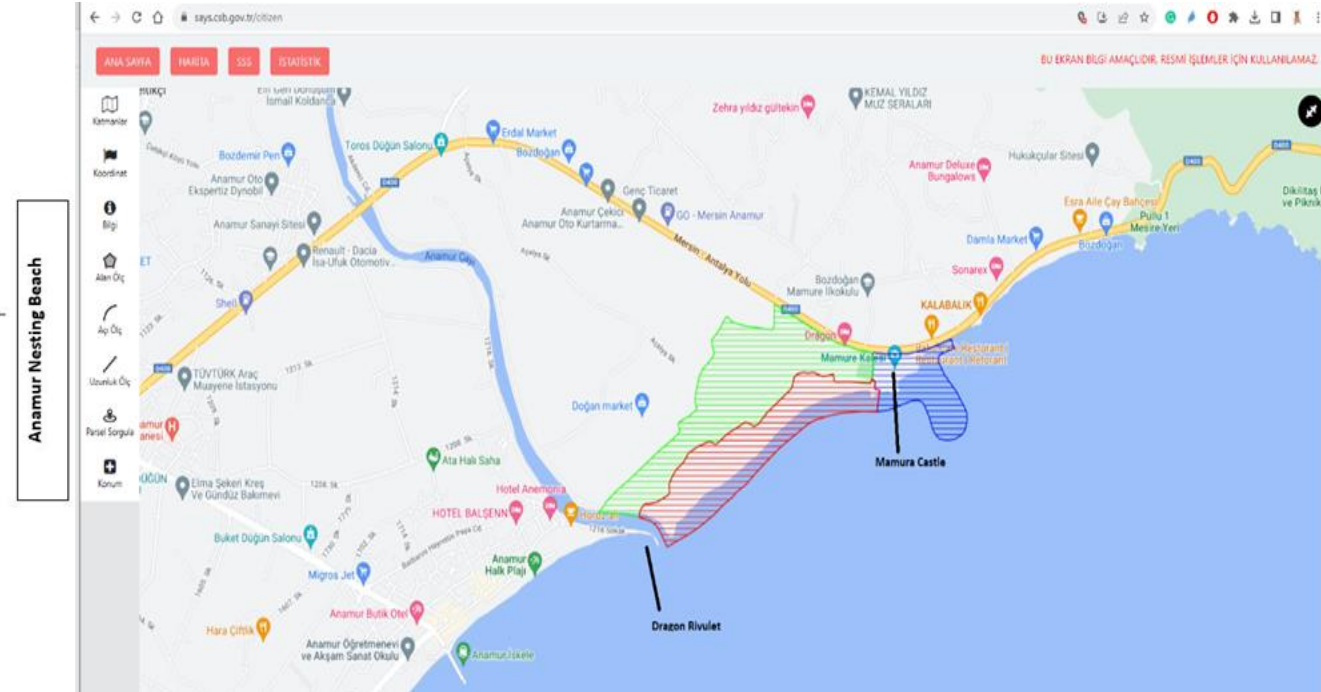
- MERÇED filed a lawsuit against the drilling license for the Geothermal Power Plant, which will permit drilling on the beach between Dragon Rivulet and Mamure Castle, further degrading its protection. The litigation process is ongoing.

New Circular on Change of Conservation Status

- The region between Dragon Rivulet, Mamure Castle, and the Pullu Forest Camp has the densest number of nests. The conservation status of this region was reorganized by the Government Official Gazette dated 29 July 2023 and number 32263. This change **narrowed down the protected area** as a preparation for future zoning change requests to allow daily usage facilities. With this rearrangement, **the natural protected area on the east of the Mamure Castle, is excluded from the scope of protection.**

OTHER ALARMING MATTERS

Site of Geothermal Plant Drilling License



The updated conservation status limits the protected area, as defined in the web page <https://says.cb.gov.tr/> The Red area denotes "Precisely Sensitive Area to be Protected", the Green area denotes "Sustainable Conservation and Controlled Use Area" and the Blue area denotes "Natural Archeological Site")

We encourage the Turkish Government to:

- **Complete the rehabilitation on the nesting beach** for the “Beach Arrangement Project” Phase 1 and 2 to be compatible with Coastal Law, Circular # B.18.0.DMP.0.01.03, and international agreements.
- **Provide location information of the “Beach Arrangement Project”** including the coordinates of the area, length of the beach occupied, and distance from the shoreline.
- **Perform an assessment for the restoration status of the Karaagac Beach.**
- **Dismiss the zoning plan change in the Aquapark region** affecting the nesting beach.
- Ensure local authorities and local businesses **comply with Turkish National law** (Circular # B.18.0.DMP.0.01.03) **and the Bern Convention’s Recommendation No. 66 (1998).**
- Stop illegal **sand extraction** and take permanent measures to prevent illegal **vehicle access** to the beach.
- **Allocate more staff** or work with a university to ensure efficient monitoring and caging.
- **Collaborate and communicate with the local NGOs** for ongoing and future changes.
- **Prevent further unsustainable stone wall construction** along the Dragon River that results in irreversible damage to the habitat and severely impacts on the nesting activity and habitat of the *Trionyx triunguis* turtles.
- **Cancel the geothermal drilling license**, which covers the nesting beach, until an EIA process by an independent scientific team evaluates its impact.
- **Retain the previous protection status** of the densest nesting area between Dragon Rivulet, Mamure Castle, and the Pullu Forest Camp, which has changed with a new Circular that was published in the Government Official Gazette dated 29 July 2023 (number 32263) and further limits the protected area.

We call upon the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention

to:

- Encourage authorities to **urgently implement the necessary actions** listed above.
- **Conduct an on-the-spot assessment** as soon as possible to verify the damage to the nesting beach and habitat and to collect the information needed in order to address the complaint.

Thank you for your attention!

