



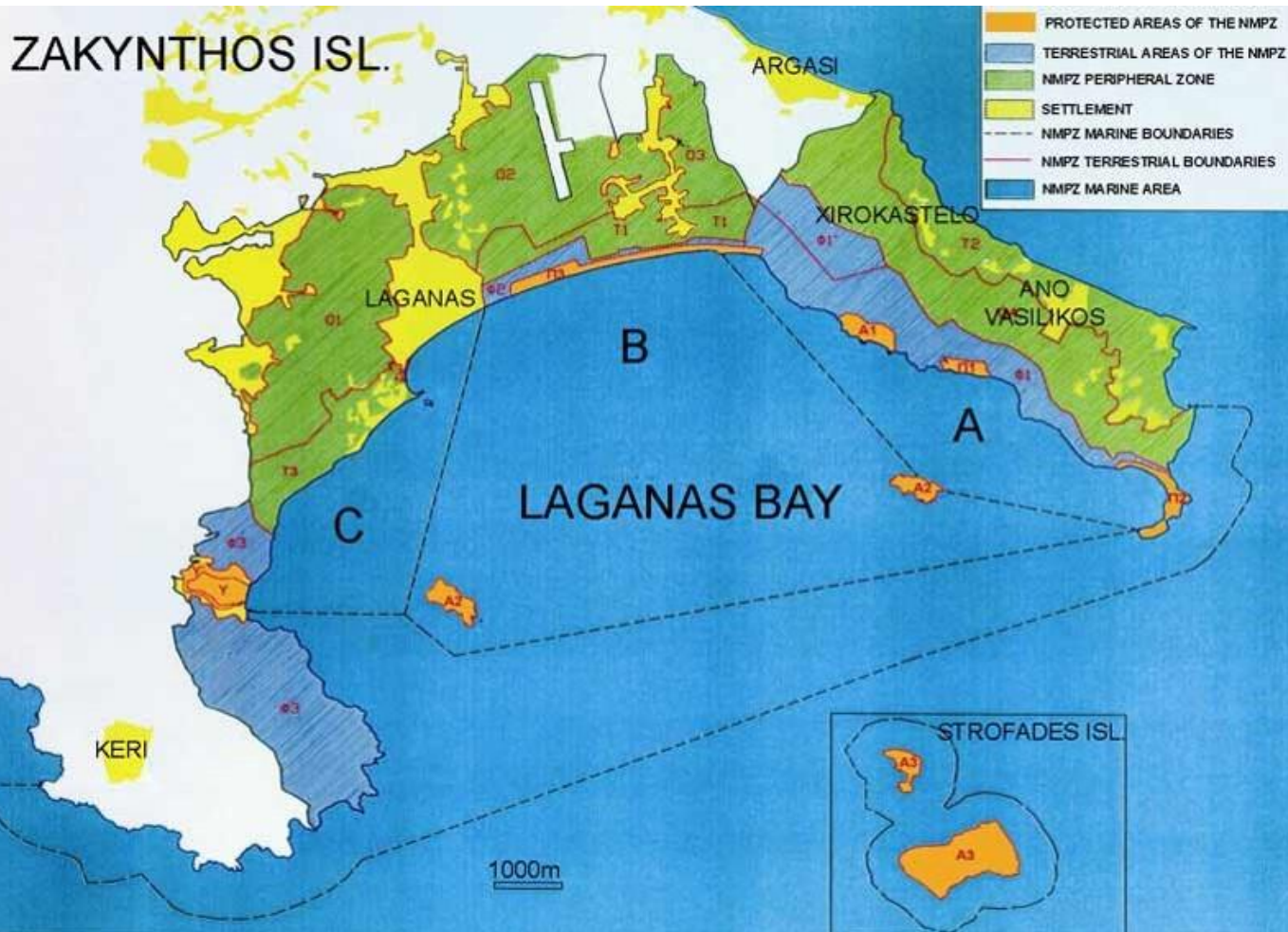
Agenda Item 6.1: Files Opened

Greece: Recommendation No. 9 (1987)
on the protection of *Caretta caretta* in
Laganas bay,
Zakynthos

43rd Meeting of the Standing Committee
Bern Convention

27th November – 1st December 2023

Violations of National and EU Legislation & Lack of Enforcement of Zakynthos National Marine Park (ZNMP) Protection Measures



Zakynthos (Laganas Bay)

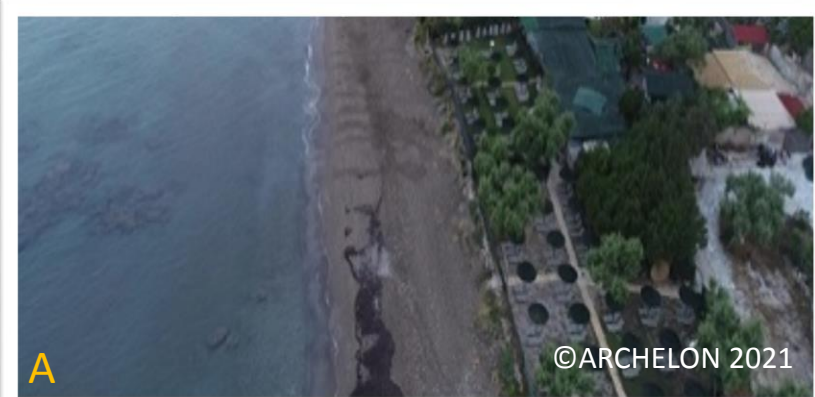
- Hosts one of the largest Loggerhead sea turtle breeding aggregations in the Mediterranean (Av. **1200*** nests/yr). During 2023 nesting season over **1870*** nests were recorded
- Nesting primarily occurs along six beaches, approx. 5.5km long
- The ZNMP was established in 1999 and the Management Agency (MA) in 2000

* Data provided by ARCHELON

Maritime zones of the NMPZ



(Measure No 1) Remove the prefabricated houses in Daphni Illegal Constructions & lack of compliance



A) The houses are no longer temporary and prefabricated, but modern and permanent structures.

B) The sand dune system has been destroyed by the illegal businesses of taverns and accommodation.

C) Hundreds of sunbeds, non-indigenous plant species and showers, still exist on the land directly behind the nesting beach.

D) No warden presence during our visit at the beach of Daphni.

(Measure No 1) Remove the prefabricated houses in Daphni Illegal Constructions & lack of compliance



Maximum number of visitors permitted was greatly exceeded:

Daphni: 406 people present on 4th July 2023 at 17:05 instead of 100 permitted.

No measures for maintaining safe distances of visitors from nests



Water sports activities occur unhindered on a daily basis at Daphni beach.

A significantly increased number of visits, compared to previous years, were recorded in Sekania beach, (an area of absolute protection) with sup..... starting from Daphni (1.5 km away within the protected area)

(Measure No 5) Remove trees and ban and penalize the use of deck chairs, sunshades and pedalos on the nesting beaches of Gerakas, Kalamaki, eastern Laganas and Marathonisi



A,B) No sunbeds were observed being removed from the front of the beaches at night; all were placed on their sides *in-situ*.

C) Maximum permitted No. of umbrellas & sunbeds was greatly exceeded :

Laganas east and Kalamaki : **486** on 4th July instead of **300** permitted
Gerakas: In addition to the permanent furniture the visitors used **private umbrellas**, covering the nesting beach.



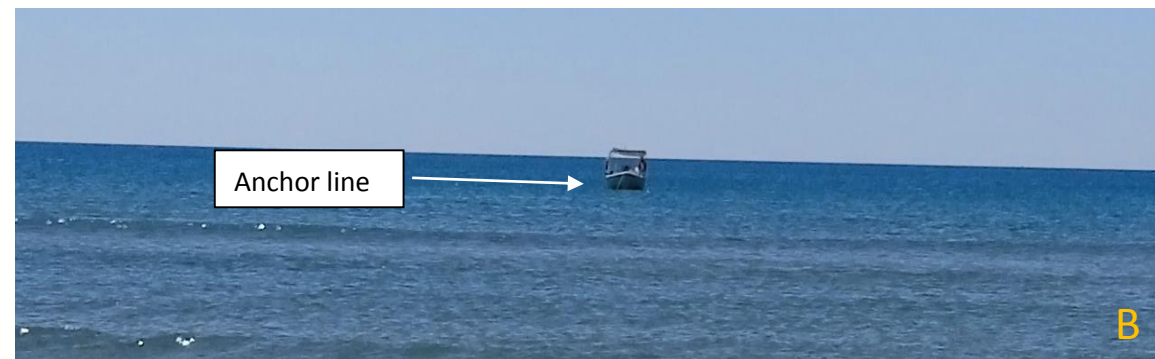
The overnumbered beach furniture and water sport equipment and the failure to remove these from the front of the nesting beaches, increase obstacles to females attempting to reach suitable nesting areas and prevent emerging hatchlings from reaching the sea.

VIOLATIONS OF Recommendation. No 9 (1987)

(Measure No 5) Remove trees and ban and penalize the use of deck chairs, sunshades and pedalos on the nesting beaches of Gerakas, Kalamaki, eastern Laganas and Marathonisi



A) At 11:10 on 4th July 2023 **29** boats were anchored at the nesting beach of Marathonisi, greatly **exceeding** the maximum limit of **10** boats at any one time.



B) Other private hire boats were observed anchored within **Zones A and B** of the maritime area where it is **prohibited** for any boat to anchor.



C,D) The sand dune system at Kalamaki beach has been destroyed by the illegal businesses' sunbeds

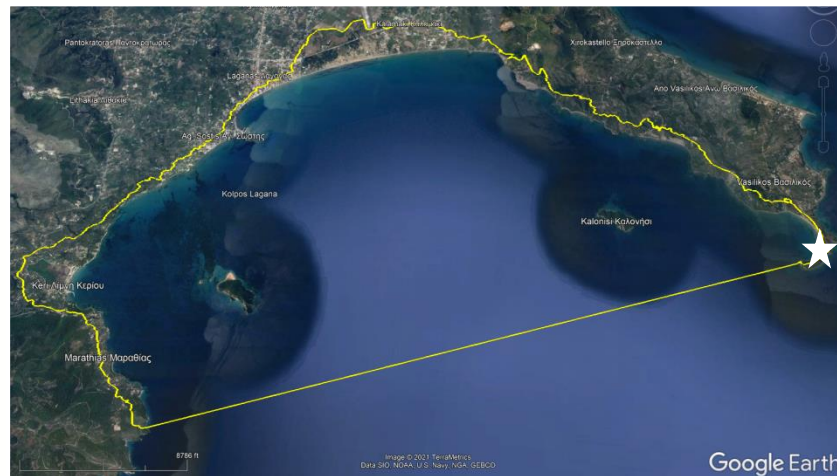


Gerakas - Illegal constructions & lack of compliance



Two illegal buildings behind Gerakas nesting beach constructed in 2017 have not been demolished.

The site has not been restored, despite the issuance of fines by the competent authority.



The Natura 2000 site GR2210002 is enclosed by the yellow line. Boundary taken from <https://natura2000.eea.europa.eu/>. White star on map insert shows location of illegal buildings.

Illegal landfill not restored



The saturated illegal landfill that operated within the ZNMP boundaries and the Natura 2000 site has yet to be restored despite its closure since December 2017.

On the 16th of November 2023, the European Commission decided to refer Greece again to the Court of Justice of the European Union for failing to restore the landfill on the island of Zakynthos within the Natura 2000 protected area.

Illegal constructions & lack of compliance

- Illegal roads between Daphni and Gerakas beaches were constructed in **2015**, expanded in **2018** and have not been demolished yet.



- The perpetrator continued the roadworks in January **2021** despite the fine of 200.000 euros imposed.
- In April **2022**, following an administrative appeal by the landowner, the fine was scandalously reduced from **200.000 to 10.000 euros**.
- MEDASSET and WWF Greece immediately lodged legal action in the Administrative Court of First Appeal.
- The court hearing is still pending.



Insufficient presence of wardens resulting in a lack of enforcement of protective management measures on nesting beaches:

Violations of restricted access to the nesting beaches during the day

Marathonisi 4th July 2023

No warden present when more than 220 visitors were present.



Gerakas 4th July 2023

No warden present at the beach of Gerakas at 12:30 when more than 500 visitors were present, exceeding the maximum number of 350 people allowed.



Laganas East 4th July 2023

Sand sculptures and castles were not flattened, presenting an obstacle to sea turtle hatchlings when crawling to the sea.

Lack of enforcement of protective management measures on nesting beaches:

East Laganas – Vrondonero Beach

Horse riders observed over the protected sand dunes. This activity continues to occur unhindered on a daily basis.



The marine area of **Laganas Bay** was monitored for 10 full days in the second half of June 2023 (low tourist season). In total 230 boat aggregations were recorded with an average of 3.7 boats per aggregation (i.e. typically 4 boats would observe a single turtle at one time).

Agios Sostis 4th July 2023

Non-compliance with the turtle spotting regulations resulting in turtles being harassed in the Bay.



Lack of enforcement of protective management measures in the Maritime Area:

Violations of the Bay's Maritime speed restriction (Max. 6 knots)



Very high risk of trauma or mortality to sea turtles due to turtle watching, as well as due to the frequent **violation of the speed limit of 6 knots** in Laganas Bay. Out of the 10 longest sea turtle residents (mostly males) of Laganas Bay present in 2023, 8 of them (80%) have experienced a boat collision with visible scars on their carapace. (<https://zakynthosturtles.org>)



During the nesting season in 2023*:

- 29 incidents of sea turtles strandings have been recorded in Zakynthos
- 9 strandings were within the protected area of Laganas Bay
- 2 cases with signs of interaction with fishing gear
- 2 cases with injuries caused by boats
- 25 animals were dead
- 4 of the turtles were injured or sick

* Data provided by ARCHELON

At National Level

Positive development (law 5037/2023 which amended law 4685/2020):

- NECCA now has investigative powers for environmental violations in its areas of responsibility.

Nevertheless, great **concerns** remain regarding the training of the rangers on their new duties as well as its sufficient enforcement.

Management plans and presidential decrees for all Natura 2000 sites in Greece, including Zakynthos:

- In **January 2023**, the Special Environmental Study (SES) concerning Natura 2000 Areas of the Regional Unit of Zakynthos was released for public consultation (13 January – 30 April 2023).
- Serious **concerns** remain about the effectiveness of the management measures for the protection of *Caretta caretta*, especially for Laganas Bay nesting beaches and maritime area.

At National Level

Seismic surveys

- Seismic surveys will continue to be carried out until the **end of 2023** in the area of the Ionian Sea.
- The data obtained from the surveys will then be analyzed and a decision will be made on the areas where the drilling for hydrocarbons will be conducted.
- MEDASSET and 14 other environmental organizations have requested the immediate cessation of the operations.

Seismic surveys in the area of the Ionian Sea for the exploitation of hydrocarbon resources are a big threat for the marine turtles in the area.

Conclusions



Extreme pressure in Laganas Bay due to:

- Uncontrolled tourism (more than 1,9 million tourists between May-September 2023)
- Poor implementation/enforcement of national and regional legislation
- ZNMP's Management Unit **lack of financial resources and staffing.**
- Uncontrolled maritime activity



Calls on the Greek Government to:

- **Increase and secure funding** to the ZNMP Management Unit, in particular for increased warden capacity and for the recruitment of scientific personnel. The needs of the Management Unit have increased after it undertook responsibility for a larger area which includes the northwestern coasts, where important habitats of other species exist.
- **Enforce** EU, National, local and NMPZ PD regulations.
- **Impose, implement and enforce appropriate fines and penalties** to deter further illegal activity and distraction.
- **Take action** to stop operation of illegal businesses in Daphni & **restore** the habitat.

Calls on the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention to:

- **Keep open** the case file of Zakynthos, Laganas Bay.
- **Follow-up** through the Greek Government Recommendation No 9, and in particular Measure No 1 regarding Daphni.
- **Perform** an on-the-spot appraisal of Laganas Bay's nesting beaches, in order to update and amend Recommendation No 9.