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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

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Strasbourg, 8-12 December 2025

Bureau of the Standing Committee

16-18 September 2025
Strasbourg

Open File: 2012/09

**Presumed degradation of nesting beaches in Fethiye and Patara
SPAs (Türkiye)**

-COMPLAINANT REPORT-

Document prepared by MEDASSET

UPDATE REPORT BY THE NGO

Marine Turtle Conservation in the Mediterranean

LOGGERHEAD SEA TURTLE (*CARETTA CARETTA*) CONSERVATION MONITORING IN FETHIYE AND PATARA SPAs, TÜRKİYE

31 July 2025

*Document presented by
MEDASSET - the Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles*

*for the 45th Standing Committee Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on the
Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention)*

MEDASSET hereby submits an update report to the 3rd Bureau Meeting of the Bern Convention (16-18 September 2025) on the conservation status of sea turtle nesting beaches in Fethiye and Patara Specially Protected Areas (SPAs) in Türkiye.

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SUMMARY

MEDASSET visited Patara and Fethiye SPA in July 2025 to assess and document the conservation status of the nesting beaches. The survey was funded by Aktionsgemeinschaft Artenschutz (AGA), www.aga-artenschutz.de. The following presents the survey findings in relation to each of the measures under Recommendation No. 183 and 182 (2015).

Fethiye Specially Protected Area: Recommendation No. 183 (2015)

The loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*) nesting beaches in Fethiye (Muğla Province, Türkiye) are among the 12 most important nesting beaches in Türkiye.¹ The nesting beaches belong to the Fethiye-Göcek Special Environmental Protection Area (SPA) established in 1988. Scientific studies have shown that nest numbers in Fethiye are declining.²

Despite clear guidance, **Recommendation No. 183 (2015) has been largely ignored.** In the Çalış A section, new water sports activities have been introduced, including the installation of platforms and flags for equipment directly on the beach. The hotel construction that began last year in the eastern part of Yanıklar has now been completed, resulting in the complete destruction of the formerly marshy habitat in that area.

Significant changes have also occurred near the channel mouth at Çalış Hill. Formerly flowing between the Small Beach and the main Yanıklar section, the channel has been rerouted, causing beach

¹ Türkozan 2000; Margaritoulis *et al.* 2003; Canbolat 2004

² Ilgaz *et al.* 2007; Katilmis *et al.* 2013; Başkale *et al.* 2016

erosion. The Small Beach has now been designated as a public beach, while the former outlet of the channel has been filled with artificial sand and is now used as a private beach area for the adjacent hotel. Displacement of nest zone markers—previously observed at Fabay Hotel—has also been recorded here. Furthermore, areas covered with stones have been artificially re-sanded, and additional fill has been added to zones designated for beach furniture. This fill is likely to shift downslope during rainfall, causing structural alterations to the Yanıklar beach segment. Landscaping activities have introduced new plant species in several hotel zones.

As previously reported, the southern section near Çalış Hill now hosts coffee shops and bars set up in front of caravans along the road. In Çalış B, facilities have significantly expanded their beach occupation. The municipal facility operated by Fethiye Municipality has substantially increased anthropogenic pressure on the nesting zone. It now includes horizontal and vertical wooden walkways within the nesting corridor, a lifeguard tower, two blocks of dressing cabins, toilets, showers, and free use of personal beach furniture by visitors. Additionally, a scaffold for individuals with impairments has been installed and anchored with chains, stones, and cement.

Sea turtles in the area face severe threats, requiring immediate corrective action. Many of the informational signs installed in previous years are now in disrepair or disuse. Although the municipal facility in Çalış B officially operates between 08:00 and 20:00, the beach is used continuously throughout the day and night. Visitors regularly ignore warning signs and engage in activities such as walking, picnicking, and recreation at all hours.

In Çalış A, sunbeds were neither removed nor stacked after sunset. Although many nesting zone marker stakes remain, pavilions have been constructed directly within nesting corridors. Business establishments routinely direct bright white security lighting toward the beach, causing significant light pollution that disrupts turtle nesting behavior.

Evidence of campfires was found at several critical nesting sites, including Çalış B, the historical nesting zone in Yanıklar, and across Akgöl Beach. Across all beaches, the presence of vertical and horizontal wooden walkways is common, and some hotels have also introduced carpet-covered paths. (Related to Recommendations Points 2, 4–7, 11, 15)

While vehicle access control has improved, vehicle tracks were still documented in several locations, including pristine zones near the vehicle entry point at Akmaz picnic area. (Rec. Point 8) No guards were observed in the protected areas, and enforcement of conservation rules remains absent. (Rec. Points 13, 14)

Although the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change has assigned field personnel for nest identification and protection, staffing levels are inadequate for the extensive coastline and high nesting density. Furthermore, it was evident that the field team lacks sufficient experience. Not all nesting beaches are being regularly monitored. Only a few prism cages were observed on Çalış Beach, despite their wider use across the Fethiye SPA. At Yanıklar Beach, each hotel appeared to be using its own prism cages, with some nests protected by flat cages that were thin and not structurally resilient. (Rec. Points 10, 16)

Conclusion

Ten years after the adoption of Recommendation No. 183 (2015), most measures remain unimplemented. This case exemplifies a serious failure to adhere to the Bern Convention's Recommendations, resulting in considerable damage to sea turtles and their critical habitats. A few minor improvements cannot reverse the degradation already inflicted. Immediate and comprehensive action is urgently required to fully implement all recommended measures.

Patara Specially Protected Area: Recommendation No. 182 (2015)

As of 2025, the situation at Patara SPA has not improved since our previous report. While some conservation efforts are observed at the Main Beach, the rest of Patara SPA remains neglected, with ongoing threats continuing to impact the nesting beaches. It is imperative that additional protective and management measures be urgently extended across the entire Patara SPA to safeguard its full nesting habitat.

Multiple issues persist across the area: vehicle access, horseback riding, construction overlooking the coastline, and various forms of pollution have all been documented. Notably, continued expansion of nearby settlements is expected to exacerbate light pollution, further threatening sea turtle nesting activity.

The boundaries of Patara SPA and the provisions of the Master Development Plan are publicly available online. Furthermore, the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change has announced a new action plan for Patara ([Patara plan](#)), which anticipates an increase in tourism and population pressure in the region. This underscores the urgent need for enhanced management interventions (Rec. Point 1).

The Patara Main Beach—also designated as an archaeological site—was found to be accessible to the public both day and night. Although access after 19:00 is officially limited to night museum tours, the beach remains in use. Security presence is limited, with a guard intermittently patrolling using white light near the beach furniture area. Poor beach furniture management was also observed within this key nesting hotspot.

At sunset, large crowds gather on the sand dunes to view the landscape. Solar-powered security cameras have been installed at this location and are monitored 24/7 by the gendarmerie. Despite this, no attempts were made during the monitoring period to disperse visitors, and local residents reported that tent camping remains common, with gendarmerie patrols now less frequent. Although protection of the Main Beach has improved, the same level of management is not applied to other beach entrances.

A second camera surveillance point has been installed at the entrance to Çayağzı Beach, giving the impression of control. However, illegal vehicle access onto the beach was detected during night patrols. In addition, gatherings of local residents contribute to noise and light pollution (Rec. Point 2).

As previously reported, the campsite near the Eşen River mouth (Letoon Beach side) was again fully occupied, with users marking off areas and planting vegetation—raising concerns that these may evolve into semi-permanent settlements. Although abandoned wooden structures have been removed from the Letoon Beach entrance, an old and dilapidated observation tower remains. In the northernmost part of Özden Beach, a few permanent structures—especially the Green Park facility—remain abandoned. No dune restoration has occurred as recommended, but no significant additional degradation was detected. However, coastal erosion in the northern section of South Beach has become increasingly severe, likely due to river dynamics and disruption of the area's natural dune systems.

Amateur boat fishing was observed at the Eşen River delta. Although no recreational shoreline fishing was recorded along the beach near the river mouth, regular inspections and monitoring of net fishing activities remain essential to ensure continued compliance with regulations.

Despite regular academic and professional monitoring, staffing remains inadequate. It is recommended that funding mechanisms be restructured to allow for the recruitment of experienced personnel. With the exception of the Main Beach, nest monitoring and protection are minimal, leaving nests vulnerable to trampling and predation. Even on the Main Beach, unprotected and predated nests were recorded. The research team must be provided with sufficient resources and manpower—especially for North

Beach, where zoning, marking, and protection are entirely absent. The specific topographic and ecological characteristics of South Beach must also be taken into account to address ongoing zoning inaccuracies.

Although access barriers exist at the entrances to the Patara Archaeological Site and near the Green Park facility, access to Letoon and Çayağzı Beaches—both situated at the mouth of the Esen River—remains unrestricted, despite being under camera surveillance (Rec. Points 4, 7, 8, and 9).

Conclusion

Recommendation No. 182 (2015) remains only partially implemented. Unfortunately, no further progress has been observed. While some improvements in management and oversight have been made, they are insufficient and limited in scope. Full implementation of the recommended measures across all sections of Patara SPA is urgently required.

This unique natural and cultural site holds the potential to become a regional model for conservation success—comparable to the nearby Dalyan SPA (İztuzu Beach)—but only if the outstanding conservation and management challenges are addressed without further delay.

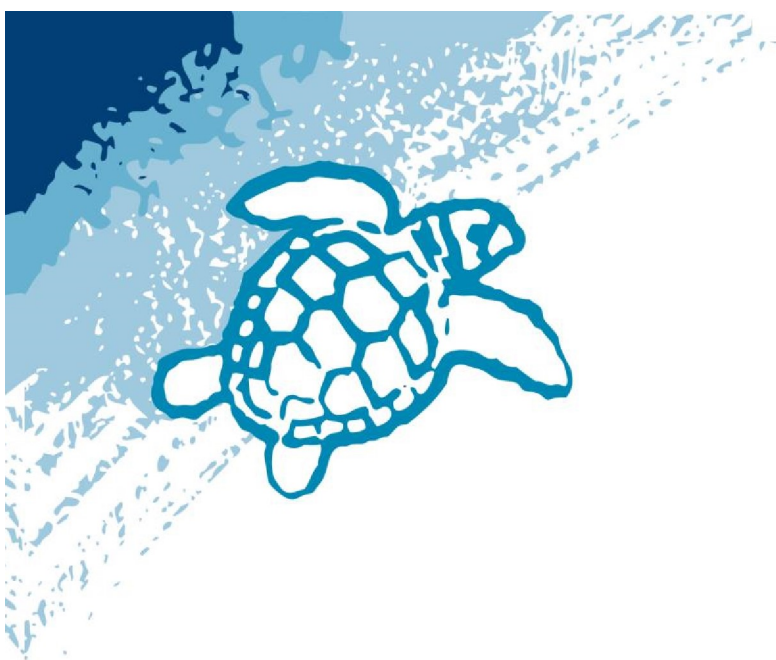
Based on the above findings, MEDASSET calls upon the Turkish authorities to:

- **Urgently and fully implement Recommendations No. 182 and 183 (2015)** through a comprehensive and updated action plan.
- **Regarding Fethiye:**
 - Provide an official map clearly outlining the beach and adjacent land areas under dispute, as well as zones permitted for development.
 - In accordance with Measure 1 of the Recommendations, impose a building moratorium to halt all further development (e.g. hotels, jetties) on or directly behind the nesting beaches.
 - Correct existing zoning errors to ensure proper protection of these areas.
- **Allocate adequate resources** to ensure the effective protection and management of the beach.
- **Regarding Patara:**
 - Guarantee that the entire nesting beach (both North and South sections), nearby marine areas, and the full extent of sand dunes are correctly zoned and protected from any further development.
 - Address the concerns outlined in MEDASSET's complaint regarding the now largely completed summer house construction project — specifically its scale, environmental impacts, and the absence of both an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and a carrying capacity study.
 - Provide detailed information on additional houses built outside the scope of the main summer house project.

MEDASSET respectfully calls upon the Bern Convention Standing Committee to:

- *Include the case file in the agenda of the 45th Meeting of the Standing Committee for discussion.*
- *Maintain the case file open to ensure continued monitoring and follow-up.*
- *Urge the Turkish authorities to promptly and fully implement all provisions of Recommendations No. 182 and 183 (2015).*

Update 13 February 2025



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Mr Carl Amirgulashvili
Chair Standing Committee of the Bern Convention

13 February 2025
Our Ref. 06.2025

Re: Updated Report for the open file 2012/09: Türkiye: Presumed degradation of nesting beaches in Fethiye and Patara SPAs

Dear Mr Carl Amirgulashvili,

MEDASSET, hereby submits an update in relation to the Open File file 2012/09: Türkiye: Presumed degradation of nesting beaches in Fethiye and Patara SPAs, to be addressed at the 2025 spring meeting of the Bureau (8-10 April).

In reference to the violations that MEDASSET witnessed during its on-site visits and we [presented](#) in the framework of the 44th Standing Committee, **we hereby report no progress** that we are aware of for their resolution and the full implementation of Recommendation No. 182 (2015) and No. 183 (2015).

We therefore encourage the Bern Convention Standing Committee to keep the case file open for further monitoring.

We are at your disposal for any further information.

Yours sincerely,



Lily Venizelos

MEDASSET President Member of IUCN-Species Survival Commission: Marine Turtle Specialist Group

With roots back to 1983, MEDASSET was founded in 1988 in England and 1993 in Greece. It is an international NGO registered as a not-for profit organisation in Greece. MEDASSET plays an active role in the study and conservation of sea turtles and their habitats throughout the Mediterranean, through scientific research, environmental education, lobbying relevant decision makers and raising public awareness. The organisation is a partner to the United Nations Environment Programme's Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP) and a Permanent Observer-Member to the Bern Convention, Council of Europe, since 1988.

Protecting marine biodiversity in the Mediterranean since 1988

Non Profit Organisation, Established by the 3187/93 Decision of the Athens' Court of First Instance
Member: MIO/ECSDE & Greek Herpetological Society. Partner to UNEP/MAP - Permanent Observer-member of the Bern Convention.