



General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean



The Monk seal in the Mediterranean Sea: measures needed for reducing by-catch

D.Cebrian

Meetings of the GFCM Subsidiary Committees
SCMEE

21st November – 3rd December 2010



MONK SEAL SPECIES OF THE WORLD

CARIBBEAN
MONK SEAL

MEDITERRANEAN
MONK SEAL

HAWAIIAN
MONK SEAL

Extinct
in 1952

Critically
endangered

Endangered





The distribution of the monk seal in the Mediterranean has drastically decreased along the last century

Monk seal distribution before 1900



Not reliable estimations exist from when it was still a common species in the Mediterranean, but its **former presence** and reproduction **all around the region** is documented

Monk seal distribution on 2000



Remaining number of individuals in the new century is **under 350** in the whole Mediterranean. The pinnipedian is almost vanished from the west basin



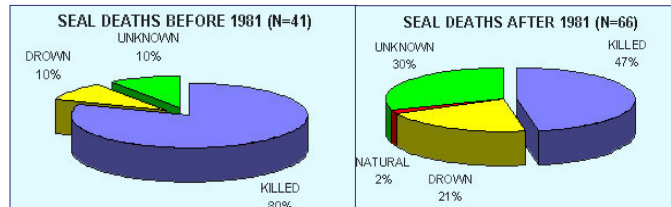
Killing of the last remaining seals

The main reason for local vanishing is scientifically established: human-related mortality, either by **direct killing** (mainly with shotguns or dynamite, carried onboard) or by **entanglement** in static nets (trammel and gill nets).





Killing of the last remaining seals



Legal protection is granted since long ago in the riparian countries where the species remains, but the reduction of killings favoured by full legal protection -as shown above by the Mediterranean situation in the European Union- is not enough to halt the extinction, because there is a **poor enforcement** of wildlife conservation regulations



Efforts by RAC/SPA along the last years



✓ Support to actions to identify seal critical habitats and populations in those countries, involving national **official institutions** (ministries, universities, research institutes, etc) and the **formation of local research and conservation teams** is under way.

✓ RAC/SPA field missions were undertaken in **Croatia, Albania, Syria, Cyprus, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco.**



✓ However, In spite of being a critically endangered species, strongly depending on the management of **critical habitat**, fishing interactions management actions are pending.





Conservation efforts need local communities involvement



✓ Local actors, notably **fishermen**, have been for too long **forgotten stakeholders** at the time of managing local conservation frameworks

✓ Appropriate **fishing management** involving different small scale fishing communities, and linked to efficient law enforcement has chances to succeed



Need for prompt reaction



✓ **Enough technical knowledge** to protect the species exists, but commitments to protect already identified critical habitat even for the most important populations of the region are not enough.

✓ Further research, alone, at this moment will not much help to protect the species in those areas. Actions to **reduce interactions with fishing gear** need to be put in place without further delay.





Existing know-how allows to succeed the recovery of the species



- **Most** of the species' breeding **caves**, existing in the areas where the biggest populations remain, are **identified**
- Monk seal **interactions** with static nets conspicuously decrease when distance between seal caves and net settings increase
- Ad hoc management actions for conservation **of the surroundings** of inhabited caves is necessary not only to implement protection of the critical habitats (while **respecting conventions and national laws**), but to avoid conflicts between coastal fisheries and the species



Fishing regulations may play a key role to preclude the monk seal extinction



The Mediterranean monk seal is listed in Annex II of the SPA/BD Protocol of the Barcelona Convention, and is listed as critically endangered by the IUCN Red List. It is now time for every Institutions and concerned stakeholders to cooperate in making reality its recovery.

The set of recommendations presented and discussed by the GFCM SCME in 2008 and 2009 should be added to those ones for elasmobranchs and birds, so as to have a coherent set of proposals on by-catch mitigation to the next GFCM 2011 session

