

COastal Management and MOnitoring Network



CHARTER OF INTENT

For the creation of the MedTurtleRescue network as part of the
COMMON project: COastal Management and MOnitoring Network for tackling marine litter in Mediterranean sea

PREMISE

The **COMMON** (COastal Management and MOnitoring Network for tackling marine litter in Mediterranean sea) project is funded by the European Union under the ENI CBC MED programme, and intends to apply the principles of ICZM (Integrated Coastal Zone Management) to address the problem of marine litter through an integrated approach, safeguarding living marine organisms, ecosystems, human health and coastal activities, including tourism and fishing.

The **COMMON** project aims to create a collaborative network between Italy, Tunisia and Lebanon to promote the reduction of marine litter in 5 pilot areas of the Mediterranean: two in Italy (Maremma and Puglia), two in Tunisia (Kuriat Island and Monastir) and one in Lebanon (Tyre). The project partners are Legambiente, the University of Siena, the Tunisian National Institute of Marine Sciences and Technology, the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari, the Lebanese NGO Amwaj of the Environment, the University of Sousse and the Tyre Coast Nature Reserve in Lebanon.

Through resource monitoring activities and the promotion of a participatory approach involving stakeholders and local communities, the **COMMON** project is testing a model that could be applied throughout the Mediterranean Basin. This process must take into account the complex interactions between the various players and the competing environmental, economic, social, cultural and recreational objectives that can impact ecosystems.

The **COMMON** project will develop monitoring protocols to evaluate the impact of the marine litter in the five pilot areas covered by the project; carry out sampling activities along the coast to study the fish species, in collaboration with local fishermen; and run ecotoxicological tests on edible species (ingestion of plastic, contaminants, biomarkers). The various monitoring activities will facilitate the identification of marine litter sources in order to plan effective mitigation actions in the affected areas, assess their impact on biodiversity, and develop effective strategies to preserve the environment.

In addition to share information to improve awareness of marine litter, the **COMMON** project will develop training and capacity building activities for local and regional authorities, Marine Protected Areas, sea turtle rescue centres and the general public.

The **COMMON** project aims to organise and manage a permanent network to coordinate sea turtle rescue centres and investigate the problem of litter throughout the Mediterranean Sea. Furthermore, building on the European directive for the reduction of single-use plastic and the previous legislation limiting the use of plastic bags, the project is calling for a ban on plastic bags throughout the Mediterranean Basin.

CONSIDERATIONS

Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) is a dynamic and multidisciplinary process that aims to promote the sustainable management of coastal zones (COM 2000). Furthermore, the European Marine Strategy Framework Directive has deemed marine litter one of the main causes of marine pollution, and it has been widely demonstrated that marine litter poses a global threat to living marine organisms and coastal development (e.g. tourism).

Marine litter is one of the most serious causes of mortality for marine turtles living in the Mediterranean; *over 180 marine species have been known to ingest plastic fragments, from plankton to large filter feeders, but Caretta caretta is one of the most at-risk species. It has therefore been proposed as an indicator species for the ingestion of litter under the Marine Strategy.*

More than 40,000 sea turtles are accidentally caught during professional fishing activities in Italy every year, and one in four does not survive. Ingestion of and/or entrapment in marine



litter, of which approximately 90% is plastic, is reported in around 50% of the animals hospitalised in the Legambiente Rescue Centres.

According to official data, 133 thousand *Caretta caretta* sea turtles are accidentally caught by professional fishermen in the Mediterranean every year (around 70 thousand fall victim to the hooks used for swordfish fishing, over 40 thousand are trapped in trawl nets, and around 23 thousand are caught in gillnets), resulting in over 40 thousand deaths. Taking all the EU fishing boats and the thousands of small boats from the African countries surrounding the Mediterranean into account, the estimates rise to 200 thousand catches and approximately 70 thousand deaths.

In addition to fishing, this species is threatened by plastic waste, which is the most common material found in the turtles hospitalised in sea turtle rescue centres and facilities. When eroded by water and weather, plastic breaks down into fragments but never completely disappears. As a result, turtles—much like fish and seabirds—can become trapped in more resistant fibres or ingest fragments with terrible consequences, from gastrointestinal blockages to the inability to dive or feed normally.

It is important to improve our knowledge of marine litter and to encourage the involvement of fishermen, turtle rehabilitation and rescue centres and facilities, local authorities, maritime operators, the tourism industry and researchers through initiatives to raise awareness among the general public and schoolchildren.

More training is required to improve the management and disposal of marine litter with regard to individuals, coastal planning bodies, local and regional authorities, marine and coastal protected areas, and turtle rehabilitation and rescue centres and facilities, driven by an awareness campaign and networking activities targeted at the Mediterranean Basin.



IN LIGHT OF THE ABOVE, THE FOLLOWING HAS BEEN AGREED

In accordance with the aforementioned objectives, one of the actions envisaged by the COMMON project is the establishment of a network of Mediterranean sea turtle rescue centres to share information and scientific data and organise information and awareness campaigns for the general public, schools, scientific institutes, research bodies, universities, local authorities, economic operators and policy-makers.

As part of the COMMON project, we will encourage all public and private entities working to protect and rehabilitate sea turtles to join the MedTurtleRescue network and adhere to the principles of this Charter of Intent, which aims to create an informal shared platform to improve coordination and sharing in the protection and rehabilitation of sea turtles in the Mediterranean. Specifically, members must undertake to:

- Share the objectives and support the actions of the COMMON project and the MedTurtleRescue network, which aim to coordinate sea turtle protection activities and upgrade the Mediterranean rehabilitation and rescue facilities;
- Share the information and scientific data in your possession, develop shared monitoring systems to standardise the data collection process, and uphold the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD);
- Promote the sharing of information on good practices with regard to the critical issues of animal rehabilitation, transport and care, as well as scientific research and technical knowledge related to species conservation;
- Promote the creation of local networks for the protection of sea turtles and the establishment of databases of all beached specimens (live or dead) connected to the national database;
- Provide information and ensure maximum awareness of marine litter and biodiversity protection issues in the Mediterranean Basin, and organise seminars, meetings and workshops to discuss and investigate shared issues;
- Initiate and strengthen various forms of collaboration with local authorities, managers of protected areas, universities, research institutes and bodies, the fishing and tourism industries and, more generally, with all the cultural, scientific and economic organisations working in the Mediterranean Sea.
- Establish a coordinated/shared event with the various centres to organise a simultaneous awareness campaign throughout the Mediterranean.



Members who adhere to the Charter of Intent must voluntarily commit to a policy of loyal and mutual collaboration to protect the sea turtles and Mediterranean biodiversity. Each of the members retains the intellectual property rights for their independent creations.

Place and date

Name of the TRC

Signature of the responsible

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