

Conservation of small cetaceans in Romanian Black Sea waters – RO

1. Policy Objective & Theme

- SUSTAINABLE USE OF RESOURCES: Preserving coastal environment (its functioning and integrity) to share space

2. Key Approaches

- Knowledge-based
- Ecosystems based approach

3. Experiences that can be exchanged

The development and implementation of a management plan and relevant actions to conserve marine mammals in coastal and open waters.

4. Overview of the case

Incidental catches of marine mammals in fishing gear were reduced as a result of measures taken as part of a National Action Plan to conserve the habitat of three cetacean species.

5. Context and Objectives

a) Context

Three small cetacean species can be found in Romanian Black Sea waters: the harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*, 400-600 individuals), the bottle-nosed dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*, 500-1000 individuals) and the common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*, 600-800 individuals). Following a period of extensive killing by all the riparian countries beginning in the early 1930s, five of them stopped hunting in 1966. Turkey also stopped in 1983 as a consequence of the moratorium on catching Black Sea cetaceans declared by the former Soviet Republic in 1966. Out of almost one million dolphins estimated in the 1950s in the whole Black Sea basin, the populations dropped to 300,000 individuals in the 1960s. In spite of the ban on catching, the stocks have continued to decline. Among the main threats to these populations are incidental catches in large nets set for fishing and habitat degradation and disturbance. Urban development and industrialisation along the coast, and the subsequent rise in pollution levels are causing the destruction of fish nurseries and the accumulation of toxic compounds in the cetaceans. Moreover, recent studies have shown a high incidence of fatal disease (mainly the nematode Pneumonia) among Black Sea dolphins.

b) Objectives

The initiative aimed to develop a technical and legal basis for the conservation of the three endangered small cetacean species in the Romanian Black Sea area. It was meant to improve knowledge of accidental catching of dolphins and impose restrictions for fishing methods known to have adverse impacts. Surveys on pollutant sources from the Romanian coast that have harmful effects on dolphins, and studies on the incidence of diseases would also be carried out in order to define and implement mitigation measures. The work would also draw up, and adopt, a national action plan based on the monitoring of the populations and on the evaluation of impacts and the main threats. Suitable measures for the conservation of the habitat, including the designation of new marine reserves were also foreseen. An awareness-raising campaign and construction of an information centre was also to be carried out.

6. Implementation of the ICZM Approach (i.e. management, tools, resources)

a) Management

The National Institute for Marine Research and Development, Grigore Antipa was responsible for the activities undertaken.

b) Tools

The planned actions were satisfactorily undertaken and the expected results were successfully attained. It made significant steps towards the development of a technical and legal basis for strengthening the national regulatory and management framework for the effective conservation of the three endangered cetacean species. Knowledge of the dolphins' populations has greatly improved. Thanks to the studies undertaken, their current status, distribution and main threats are now well documented. Dolphin sightings, strandings and incidental takes were systematically recorded with the collaboration of a network of surveyors and volunteers operating along the Romanian Black Sea Coast. Furthermore, a survey of adverse impacts of marine and land-based economic activities on dolphins was undertaken. A Marine Mammal Database for the Romanian Black Sea coast was expanded and now contains all collected survey data. The information included in this database is shared with other regional databases such as MEDACES, the Mediterranean database used by the International Agreement for the Conservation of Cetaceans (ACCOBAMS). A national action plan for dolphin conservation was drawn up with the collaboration of the main stakeholders and authorities involved in dolphin conservation, as well as international experts and the support of ACCOBAMS. As a result of the surveys conducted, the best areas for dolphin protection in the Romanian littoral have been identified which correspond to the marine reserves of Vama Veche - 2 Mai Reserve and the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve. A management plan was drawn up for the former. The project helped raise local awareness of the conservation of cetaceans through the implementation of numerous activities with the participation of local institutions (a dolphinarium, schools, children's clubs, etc.). A dolphins' week has been organised every year featuring exhibitions, theatre performances, drawing contests among other activities. However, the setting up of an information centre on the sea shore incurred several difficulties.

7. Cost and resources

The total budget was €416,631.00 of which there was a Life contribution of €208,315.00. In total, around 50 people worked on the initiative on a voluntary basis.

8. Effectiveness (i.e. were the foreseen goals/objectives of the work reached?)

Incidental catches of marine mammals decreased as a result of the actions taken: all of the proposed objectives were fulfilled.

9. Success and Fail factors

A good collaboration network was established, not only among the project partners but also with the main stakeholders working on the marine environment (fishermen, coast guards, frontier police, national water company, environmental protection inspectorate, etc.). The central role of the National Institute for Marine Research and Development ensures long-term management, further development and implementation of the Action Plan.

10. Unforeseen outcomes

The National Institute for Marine Research and Development received the custody for the management of the Vama Veche - 2 Mai Reserve from the Ministry of the Environment, in accordance with Romanian legislation regarding the management of protected areas.

11. Prepared by

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12. Verified by

It has not been possible to verify this case.

13. Sources

- Conservation of dolphins from the Romanian Black Sea waters. Layman's report (2004) LIFE00NAT/RO/7194



Laymans report (867.75 KB) 