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Mediterranean Sea Turtles in Need of a Regional Conservation Strategy

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The circumglobal species *Caretta caretta* and *Chelonia mydas* have evolved distinct populations within the Mediterranean. It is estimated that the Mediterranean loggerhead population is the third largest in the world after those of Oman and the United States. While nesting areas in

the Mediterranean are concentrated in the eastern basin, sea turtles seem to migrate long distances for exploiting various habitats.

Furthermore, a large contingent of immature loggerheads, originating from the southeastern USA, enters the

Mediterranean through the Straits of Gibraltar and utilizes the western basin as feeding grounds. They frequently interact with the longline fishery there.

Exploitation by humans reached a peak in the early 1960s when a sea turtle fishery was active in the eastern Mediterranean. Today, despite legislation, there is still traditional consumption in some coastal communities, which may well exceed the sustainability of existing populations.

Sea turtles in the Mediterranean are protected under several international conventions (Bern convention, CMS,

Oral Presentations: Conservation Techniques and Programs

etc.). However, the convention that encompasses all Mediterranean countries is the Barcelona Convention. While the parties to this convention have already developed a specific Action Plan, a Regional Conservation Strategy is needed in order to define main actions and set priorities for research, conservation and management. Furthermore, a common strategy would develop cooperative mechanisms for assessing conservation status, identifying and protecting critical areas, monitoring population trends, and enforcing international agreements.