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Treatment of Mediterranean monk seals in Greece: mitigating the seal - fisheries conflict.

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Abstract

The Mediterranean monk seal rehabilitation program, established in 1990 by MOm, has contributed significantly to the survival of this critically endangered marine mammal, and has allowed to monitor mortality patterns of the species nationwide. Over the last 15 years, 7 pups and 8 sub-adult/adult seals have been rescued, treated and released healthy back to their natural environment; 80 necropsies have been performed providing evidence for the identification of the species' death causes. Fishery related mortality remains a key threat for the species, especially for the adult and sub-adult segment of the populations. We present data related to monk seal strandings with problems arising from interactions with fisheries: injuries induced by humans (shooting guns, harpoons, spear guns, dynamites), entanglement in fishing gear (gill nets or long lines) and entrapment in aquacultures. In all cases rescue and specific treatment procedures were followed, however with variable results: some animals recovered and were released, while others did not survive. Recognizing the importance of the interaction between the Mediterranean monk seal and the fishery sector a new program has been initiated, in the framework of LIFE-Nature (MOFI project: Monk Seals and Fisheries: Mitigating the conflict in Greek Seas) to mitigate the negative consequences to both seals and fisheries on a national level in collaboration and with the active involvement of artisanal fishermen.