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GESELLSCHAFT ZUM SCHUTZ DER MEERESSÄUGETIERE

**PRESS RELEASE**

## **Osteoporosis in Marine Mammals**

Hamburg, 1.2.2001 - An alarming discovery was made by scientists on a seal. A post mortem carried out on a dead Mediterranean monk seal near the Turkish town of Cesme revealed that it had not only been suffering from malnutrition but also from a decrease in bone mass. The two-metre-long, young female weighed 116 kilos, roughly half the normal weight. Its blubber thickness measured only half a centimetre, vertebrae and hip bones were visible through the skin, its bones were light and brittle.

Instead of the usual spoils of fish and other marine animals, the seal had only the remains of two sea sponges, some sea grass, five squid beaks and parasites in its stomach. The enlarged uterus showed that she had given birth shortly before her death; the pup would have had no chance of survival. It can be concluded from the seal's poor condition, the contents of its stomach and the osteoporosis that it was unable to find enough food to survive. It became a victim of catastrophic over-fishing. According to the Dutch scientist, Dr Peter van Bree: "It is highly likely that it was unable to catch enough large fish to provide a sufficient supply of calcium."

Only about 300 of the once commonly-found seals from warmer latitudes have survived in the Mediterranean, mainly off the coast of Greece and Turkey. Until a few years ago, the largest population was to be found off the coast of Mauritania where the Atlantic borders on the Mediterranean, but an epidemic caused by pollution and over-fishing wiped out half the animals.

A colony of approximately 25-30 individuals lives off the Portuguese archipelago of Madeira. These seals have a good life. They are kept under surveillance. In their immediate environment, fishing is forbidden and in the adjoining waters, it is restricted - which has also proved to be an advantage to the fishermen. Fish stocks have, in fact, recovered.

"How many more signs do we need before we accept that our seas and our fish stocks need the chance to recover?" says Petra Deimer, President of the Society for the Conservation of Marine Mammals. "If the indicators are that animals at the end of the food chain, such as whales, dolphins and seabirds, are suffering, then we can be sure that the ecosystem 'sea' is not in good health."

- 2 -

Spendenkonto: Postbank Hannover, BLZ 250 100 30, Kto. 3576 464-309.

*The article quoted:* "[Osteoporosis in an Adult Female Monk Seal Monachus monachus from Cesme, Turkey](#)", by E.J.O. Kompanje, H. Güclüsoy and P.J.H. van Bree appeared in "[The Monachus Guardian](#)" Vol.3/No.1, 2000.

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