



# Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

*Secretariat provided by the United Nations Environment Programme*



## PRESS RELEASE

### First Agreement that Might Save Mediterranean Monk Seal from Extinction

Adeje, Tenerife, Spain, 18 October 2007 – A new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the protection of the Eastern Atlantic Populations of the Mediterranean Monk Seal was concluded under the auspices of CMS. The Islamic Republic of Mauritania, the Kingdom of Morocco, the Republic of Portugal and the Kingdom of Spain signed the agreement in Adeje in the margins of the CMS meeting on Western African Talks on Cetaceans and their Habitats (WATCH). The agreement will be open for signature to all the Atlantic range states.

Since 1986, the populations of Mediterranean Monk Seals have been at the centre of the Mediterranean Action Plan of UNEP. The Mediterranean Monk Seal has also been a main focus of CMS conservation measures for marine mammals. The Mediterranean Monk Seal is one of the most threatened marine mammals in the world and is listed on the Appendices of the Convention. Only approximately 500 Mediterranean Monk Seals remain in the wild. Appendix I listing commits member states to ban seal hunting and capture and to conserve its habitat to counteract factors impeding migration. This includes surveying other threat factors as well as preventing disturbance to the species.

Monk Seal populations play an important role in coastal and marine ecosystems. But natural phenomena and the development of human activities have significantly reduced them. The Eastern Atlantic Populations of the Mediterranean Monk Seal greatly suffer from entanglement and mortality in fishing gears, over fishing, hunting and human persecution, pollution, as well as from natural factors such as toxic phytoplankton. In addition, destruction of breeding sites and collapsing breeding cave further accelerate habitat loss. As a result of the alarming conservation status – no more than 500 seals remain in the Mediterranean and along the Eastern Atlantic coastline - IUCN has classified the species as Critically Endangered.

The species has disappeared from most of its distribution range, except for a few isolated groups. There are two breeding colonies of Mediterranean Monk Seal in the Eastern Atlantic: one on the Desertas Islands (Madeira) and the other on the Cabo Blanco Peninsula (Morocco-Mauritania). Since the colonies are probably isolated demographically and genetically with less than 200 seals each concentrated along a few kilometres of coastline, experts regard its status in the Atlantic as very critical.

Over the last years, an Action Plan for the Conservation of the Eastern Atlantic Monk Seal was elaborated and finally approved at the Eighth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CMS, held in Nairobi, Kenya in November 2005. CMS Executive Secretary Robert Hepworth said: “The Action Plan provides a new focus for cross-border Monk Seal conservation by identifying the obligations of the range states. It is the first time that Monk Seal conservation actions in the Atlantic region have been approached in a spirit of international co-operation. This instrument is a significant step towards improving the conservation status and the habitat of the Eastern Atlantic Monk Seal throughout its range in cooperation with the four signatory states.”

The Action Plan lays down the procedures to implement co-ordinated actions. It provides a means to combine programs from different states, local and private organizations into efficient, co-ordinated efforts, which should lead to the recovery of the depleted population of the species. The immediate goal is to stop the decline and, in medium term, promote recovery.

The Action Plan will include measures to evaluate the status and threats to Monk Seals and increase Monk Seal populations. The main action is the creation of a Network of Special Areas of Conservation for the Monk Seal (SACMS) to help restore populations. Increased liaison and coordination between the Barcelona Convention and CMS is expected to promote the conservation of the species.

CMS and its partners are looking forward to seeing recovery for the situation of the Monk Seal. The CMS Secretariat is confident that the new agreement will prevent the only pinniped in the Mediterranean from becoming extinct.

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