

PRESS RELEASE

Year of the Dolphin launched in Greece with Pan Hellenic event

Agios Nikolaos/Crete 17 July – Conservation bodies, Members of Parliament and corporate partners are meeting in Crete to kick off the Year of the Dolphin in Greece. The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) with its campaign partners are joining forces to protect endangered dolphin species in Greece. The special event to promote the Year of the Dolphin is supported by the main organizer Essence Consulting.

“Greece plays a strategically important role because of its huge area that serves as habitat to marine species. With its active support of the Year of the Dolphin campaign, Greece is a corner piece in the Mediterranean jigsaw”, said CMS Executive Secretary Robert Hepworth.

CMS with its partners, the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS) and the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS) have committed themselves to conserving endangered dolphin species and their habitats in the Mediterranean. Following the serious decline of the short-beaked common dolphin population in the Mediterranean, the species was added to Appendix I of the Convention. As a result, ACCOBAMS has tailored a Conservation Plan for Mediterranean common dolphins, where the island of Kalamos was identified as an important area of conservation for this species. The Milan based Tethys Research Institute and WDCS, both ACCOBAMS partners, are currently implementing management and public awareness plans helping towards the recovery of the species.

“The decline of the short-beaked common dolphin represents one of the most serious problems in the Mediterranean. Stopping it by undertaking appropriate conservation measures is a huge priority that cannot be ignored”, said ACCOBAMS Executive Secretary, Marie-Christine Grillo Van Klaveren.

ACCOBAMS has submitted a new proposal for large areas of protection in the Mediterranean and Black Seas for some of the world’s most threatened whale and dolphin populations. One of these areas would be in the Amvrakikos Gulf in North Western Greece where about 150 bottlenose dolphins live in a semi-enclosed area, which could function as a natural laboratory for research. Greece and other Parties to ACCOBAMS will be called to express their views on this proposal at their next Meeting of the Parties in October 2007.

Besides research and conservation, the educational campaign to emphasize threats to dolphins among a greater public and the need to enhance conservation measures are another focus of the Year of the Dolphin. The publications produced as part of the campaign encourage children to learn more about dolphins and to start their own activities for the benefit of marine mammals. 2300 Dolphin Manuals in Greek were distributed by the corporate partner TUI in tourist destinations in Greece, among which 600 were in Crete. The distribution through the UNESCO

network of schools in Greece will lay the foundation for a comprehensive conservation approach.

“Greece is known as the land whose literature, myths and art helped establish dolphins as inspirational allies in the great human endeavours at sea. Now we have a chance to see modern Greece carry forward the flame of Hellenism to ignite a new campaign to save dolphins from extinction, and allow humans to enjoy watching them in their natural environment. Long live the Greek Dolphin!”, concluded Mr. Hepworth.

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