

NEW OBSERVATIONS OF SEA TURTLE TRADE IN ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT

SUMMARY OF REPORT BY
MEDASSET - MEDITERRANEAN ASSOCIATION
TO SAVE THE SEA TURTLES
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MEDASSET
Mediterranean Association
to Save the Sea Turtles

WILDLIFE CRIME IS A SERIOUS CRIME

"Illegal trade in wildlife has become a sophisticated transnational form of crime, comparable to other pernicious examples, such as trafficking of drugs, humans, counterfeit items and oil. It is driven by rising demand, and is often facilitated by corruption and weak governance.

Illegal wildlife trade undermines the rule of law and threatens national security; it degrades ecosystems and is a major obstacle to the efforts of rural communities and indigenous peoples striving to sustainably manage their natural resources. Combatting this crime is not only essential for conservation efforts and sustainable development, it will contribute to achieving peace and security. I urge all consumers, suppliers and governments to treat crimes against wildlife as a threat to our sustainable future. It's time to get serious about wildlife crime."

Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General



"Through this report, MEDASSET aims to assist Egyptian managers, decision-makers and conservationists, to safeguard sea turtle populations in Egyptian waters and halt the illegal sea turtle trade in Alexandria. We truly hope that this document will be taken into consideration by Egyptian authorities and experts, and that it will act to invigorate enforcement of the trade ban as well as to further sea turtle research and conservation, awareness-raising and educational activities."

Lily Venizelos- MEDASSET Founder & President





Map of sea turtle trade locations in Alexandria, Egypt.

MAP KEY: Abu Qir, El Max, Anfoushi area (which includes El Medan and Omar Basha market) where sea turtle trade was observed or reported. In Al Miaddiyah and Idku respondents claim there is trade and a storage facility, respectively.

HISTORY

The Mediterranean coastal waters of Egypt host important sea turtle foraging sites and migratory corridors. Trade of sea turtles in Egypt has been known to occur since the early 20th century and turtle consumption in Alexandria has been recorded since the 1970s. Since 1993, MEDASSET has monitored the illegal trade and carried out campaigns that led to law enforcement and conservation initiatives.



Abu Qir public fish market.

“NEW OBSERVATIONS OF SEA TURTLE TRADE IN ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT”

(Download complete report at www.medasset.org)

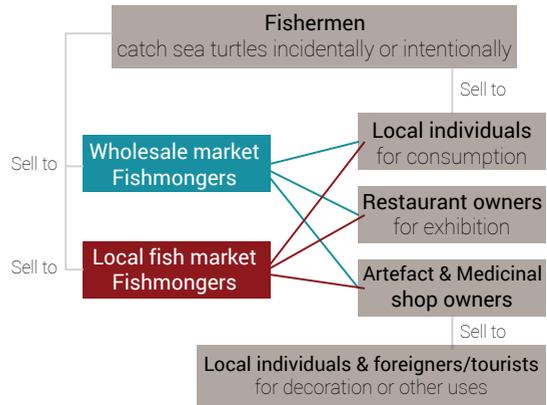
CITATION: Boura, L., S.S. Abdullah, M.A. Nada. 2016. New observations of sea turtle trade in Alexandria, Egypt. A report by MEDASSET - Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles. 27 pp.

In June 2016, MEDASSET released the report: “New observations of sea turtle trade in Alexandria, Egypt” based on a survey conducted in Alexandria’s markets during September 2014 – March 2015 in order to record the trade status and to gain insight into current local perceptions.

FINDINGS

The survey revealed that hidden trade persists and public trade has resumed. Trade was observed or reported in 6 markets in 3 areas of Alexandria. Interviews indicate that trade has increased by 60- 120% in comparison to surveys in 1998-9 and 2007.

Turtles are sourced from fishers in Alexandria who mostly catch them incidentally. Fishermen bring ashore 90% of by-caught turtles instead of releasing them and reported an annual catch rate of 4.51 turtles/vessel (total 216.5 turtles/year by 48 interviewees). Fishmongers and artefact sellers also reported obtaining turtles from other Egyptian fisheries.



Trade route from boat to buyer. In addition to the local trade route, turtles are said to be sourced from other Egyptian Mediterranean areas (Damietta, Port Said) the Red Sea.

SEA TURTLES

Both loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*) and green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) are targeted. There is a higher impact on adults, which are the most valuable reproductive segment of the populations. The rare leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*) is also traded, as revealed by a police operation that was carried out by Egyptian authorities in May 2015 after MEDASSET submitted preliminary survey results.

Fishermen either slaughter turtles on-board and consume or sell the meat directly to customers, or land turtles alive and sell them to fishmongers. Three fishmongers are specialised in turtle trade and at least 36 trade sporadically. Turtles are kept alive and emaciating from 1 to 30 days until slaughter. Fishermen and fishmongers also supply the artefact market. Sale of embalmed turtles and shells, including Red Sea hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) was observed in shops. Interviewees reported artefact sales to tourists, which may imply CITES infringements.



Next to a sea turtle shell, two embalmed Whitetip reef sharks, *Triaenodon obesus*, and shells of *Tridacna* spp clams on sale at artefact shop in El-Sayed Mohamed Karim Al Mazar Str., Anfoushi area



Several shells of freshly slaughtered sea turtles were publicly traded in El Medan fish market, Anfoushi area found during the law enforcement operation in May 2015. Photo :W.A. Elmissiry.



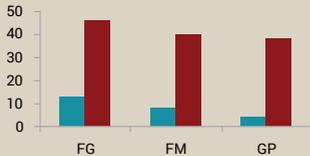
Green turtle slaughter and meat preparation for sale to a sitting customer at El Medan public fish market. Turtles are kept alive upside down on the ground for 1-30 days

THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

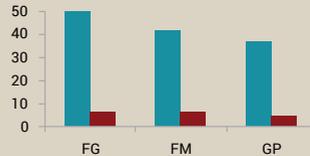
Eighty-six percent of interviewees had consumed sea turtle meat, even though 90% were aware it is illegal and 79% knew sea turtles are endangered. Main drivers are tradition or alleged health benefits. The survey indicates that the community does not depend on turtles as a food source and the trade is not considered an important income, except by the few "specialised" fishmongers.

A TOTAL OF 148 INDIVIDUALS OF THE FOLLOWING TARGET GROUPS WERE INTERVIEWED:
FISHERMEN (48)
FISHMONGERS (57)
ARTEFACT SELLERS (1)
GENERAL PUBLIC (BUYERS OR RESIDENTS) (42)

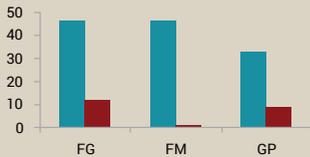
FG=Fishmongers FM=Fishermen GP=General Public
 ■ Yes ■ No ■ Indifferent



Have you drunk sea turtle blood?
Why? **Yes:** curiosity, traditions, health & fertility benefits. **No:** Religious restrictions.



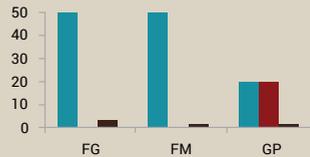
Are you aware that killing or trading of sea turtles is illegal?



Have you eaten sea turtle meat?
Why? **Yes:** nutritious, tasty, traditions, health benefits, curiosity. **No:** don't like the look of it.

Do you prefer green or loggerhead turtle? All prefer green - as per past survey results - except from 2 who had no preference.

Are you willing to stop consumption?
No: 88%, but clarified that they do not depend on turtles as a regular food source.



Do you think that it's important to protect them?
 Two fishmongers clarified that turtles should be protected in order to maintain supply for consumption.

Are you aware that sea turtles are endangered? Do you know anything about sea turtle biology and life?
 79% replied 'Yes', stating inter alia that sea turtles eat seagrass, jellyfish, crabs, fish..

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey demonstrates that, despite past efforts, the illegal sea turtle trade in Alexandria, which is the last major hotspot of sea turtle exploitation in the Mediterranean, has yet to be eradicated.

In addition, the death rate of sea turtles caught by Alexandria's fishing fleet is likely to be much higher than that of other fisheries in the Mediterranean that are not supplying an illegal sea turtle meat and artefact market.

Ending the trade and mitigating fisheries interaction in Egypt will benefit sea turtle population recovery and amplify conservation efforts across the Mediterranean. Egypt's importance as a priority area for marine turtle conservation is reconfirmed by the survey.

Prior to the publication of the report, the survey's preliminary findings and a list of locations where illegal trading was occurring, were submitted to the Egyptian authorities that led to the arrest of two fishmongers highly involved in the illegal trade.

The report was formally submitted to the Ministry of Environment of Egypt and provides useful recommendations on urgently needed research, conservation and policy action, such as a national action plan, law enforcement activities, educational and behaviour-changing campaigns, surveys and activities with fishermen, sea turtle rescue, capacity building, empowerment of local civil society, etc.



Embalmed loggerhead on sale at an artefact shop in Souk Al Akadin, Anfoushi area.



If you witness illegal trade, captivity or consumption of sea turtles, please report it to MEDASSET or to local authorities.

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