



TOURISM IN MALTA

Worldwide tourism, with over 11 million international travellers, represents 9% of global economy and 1% jobs. In Malta, tourism sector is also one of the main drivers of the national economy. In 2011 the number of tourists visiting Malta was 1,411,747 (Tourism policy for the Maltese Islands, 2012-2016). Tourism accounts directly for 10% of Maltese Gross National Product, 14% of government income, 10% of employment and 6% on imports and outflows. When other indirect impacts are taken into account, these figures increase to 29% of GNP, 33% of government income, 29% of employment and 16% of imports and outflows (Tourism policy for the Maltese Islands, 2012-2016).

In relation to marine biodiversity, several activities of tourism stand out as being of special relevance: nature tours, mainly whale watching activities, yachting, sport fishing, the national aquarium, diving and beach tourism. Dolphin watching is an activity that is not well-developed in Malta. Nevertheless, it could potentially be developed in the near future as an eco-tourism activity. Yachting is an intense activity in the eastern side of the Maltese Islands, between Malta and Gozo and around Gozo Island. Yachters should be made increasingly aware that deliberate disturbance of dolphins is not allowed, to reduce episodes linked with the chasing of sighted dolphins with speedboats.



Recreational fishing in Malta is important in terms of use of maritime waters. This segment comprises vessels that are registered in the national fishing fleet register and are classified

as non-commercial vessels, that is, recreational. These cannot practice any professional fishing operations and can only use minor fishing gear. A fishing licence is issued to each recreational vessel in line with the Fishing Vessels Regulation.

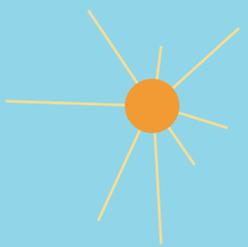
The Malta National Aquarium, located at Qawra in the northeast of the island, is one of important tourist attractions in Malta. The public aquarium has 26 display tanks with, amongst others, Mediterranean fish, including fish commonly found in Maltese waters together with replicas of historical artefacts that one can find in the seas around the Maltese Islands.



Recreational diving is a popular activity for tourists in Malta. In 2010 around 57,000 diving tourists were recorded in the Maltese Islands (Tourism policy for the Maltese Islands, 2012-2016). Interesting dive sites include the Blue Hole at Dwejra (Gozo).



Finally, the beaches are some of the major attractions of the Maltese Islands for tourists, many of them are Blue Flag beaches ensuring that they are managed in an environmentally sustainable manner.



TOURISM, CETACEANS AND MARINE TURTLES

Tourism is one of the main human activities directly affecting the conservation of cetaceans and marine turtles and more generally the marine environment.

Mass tourism along the Maltese coast creates several problems for the marine environment.



Dolphin watching can have negative effects on cetaceans. Some studies have shown how human presence affects different animals, demonstrating that they can be intimidated when there are closely approached, but that they can tolerate, and even habituate to human activities if they are easy to anticipate.

Recreational navigation should not in principle constitute a threat to cetaceans and turtles and their habitats. Observations at sea show, however, that irresponsible behaviour may be a risk for cetaceans, turtles and the marine environment and for navigation in general (e.g. anchorage in sea grass beds of phanerogams, spills or garbage thrown into the sea, ship strikes and persecution of cetaceans with jet-skis and speed boats). Harassment can produce alterations in the behaviour of the animals, stress and exclusion from the area if disturbance is persistent.

Tourism activities exhibiting and offering interaction experiences with animals such as the **aquarium** could have a negative impact on animal protection and welfare.

Diving can result in negative impacts on the marine environment if it is not conducted in a responsible and sustainable way. Bad practices include anchorage in vulnerable habitats, harassment and harm to the species, collection of organisms and feeding animals.



Pollution of water by toxic substances, hydrocarbons and debris are common to all sectors. The risk of inadequate waste water treatment and waste management, and in particular the disposal at sea of plastic waste, discarded or lost fishing gear and hydrocarbon fuels and lubricants can all be attributed also to the tourism sector and can have potentially important effects on cetacean and turtles health.

RISK MITIGATION MEASURES

For most potential risks, prevention and mitigation measures exist. For others, the collaboration between the regulatory frameworks and authorities, the tourism sector and scientists, is developing and testing new technological measures that can make social and economic growth compatible with the conservation of marine biodiversity.

HARASSMENT

Protection of marine turtles and cetaceans is of paramount importance due to conservation concern. This protection could be realised through the enactment of legislative instruments or through establishment of voluntary guidelines and best practice techniques to address specifically the code of conduct for the correct approach to cetaceans and marine turtles based on the development of non-intrusive activities, avoiding bothering or harming the animals, establishing a maximum approach distance, making the correct manoeuvre without harassing the animals, and not crowding boats together.

SHIP STRIKES

Speed limitation in vicinity of cetaceans and marine turtles.

UNCONTROLLED SPORTS FISHING

There is a need to address this issue in order to ensure the competitiveness of responsible fishers.

SPORT FISHING, YACHTING AND OPPORTUNISTIC FEEDING OF DOLPHINS AROUND FISH-FARMS:

The opportunistic feeding of dolphins around fish-farms requires the establishment of preventive measures.

NOISE POLLUTION

Engines, propellers, and hull noise can be greatly reduced by good maintenance and optimisation of technological measures that not only mitigate risk of noise pollution but also increase cost-efficiency of the vessel.

DEBRIS POLLUTION

Appropriate waste management in accordance with international regulations is critical to avoid the accumulation at sea of debris. Debris pollution in the oceans has become a global problem that can even cause damage to yachts in gyres of mass accumulation of macro plastics. Reporting of areas of debris accumulation is important for the establishment of mitigation measures. Diving centres and yachts can also constitute an important platform of opportunity for the removal of debris at aggregation sites.

TOXIC POLLUTION

Appropriate management of grey and black waters, fuels, lubricants and bilge water in accordance with international regulations is critical to avoid the accumulation of hydrocarbons in the seas. Reporting of areas of hydrocarbon accumulation is important for the establishment of mitigation measures. Avoiding discharges of untreated wastewater at sea in accordance with European legislation is the key to reduce water pollution.

NESTING OF MARINE TURTLES

There is only one recent record of a turtle-nesting attempt in Maltese waters. However, nesting attempts are possible and should be accounted for.

AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

The tourism sector has a great potential for awareness and education about conservation of marine biodiversity. There is a need to launch awareness raising campaigns and education activities to protect marine environment.

TOURISTS, DIVERS AND YACHTSMEN AND THE STEWARDSHIP OF OUR SEAS

Tourists, divers and yachtsmen can play an important role in the stewardship of our oceans. They can contribute to the surveillance of illegal activities and offer a unique platform of opportunity to conduct debris pollution removal and collect scientific data for the monitoring of ocean ecosystems. Participation and collaboration in research targeting ecosystem based management as with pollution contingency plans, contributing to platforms of ocean observation and forecasting.

Assisting sea turtles entangled or hooked is an important contribution to conservation. In such circumstances it is best to contact the relevant environment institutions:

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REFERENCE DOCUMENTS, MATERIALS AND LINKS:

www.marinenatura2000malta.com

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