

Environment Resources Authority designates eight new marine protected areas

Monday, 2 May 2016, 11:07

Last update: about 9 months ago



Eight new marine protected areas covering a total area of 3,450 kilometres squared around the Maltese islands have been proposed by Malta.

These marine protected areas were chosen to form part of the European Union's Natura 2000 network (an ecological network of protected areas designed to protect the ecologically important habitats and species across Europe) and is based on the results of two EU LIFE+ projects, namely the LIFE+ MIGRATE and LIFE+Malta Seabird Project.

These new sites are an addition to the five marine Natura 2000 sites already in place in Maltese waters, which were based primarily on the presence of *Posidoniaseagrass* meadows.

The eight new sites reach beyond the immediate coastal waters and are within the Malta's 25 nautical mile zone. Five of these sites were designated for the protection of seabird species, another site was designated for the protection of loggerhead turtle, while two more sites were chosen for seabirds as well as turtles and dolphins.

The EU LIFE+ MIGRATE project, which project has started in October 2012 and is ending in April 2016, aimed at identifying important areas for the loggerhead turtle (*il-fekrunatal-baħaril-komuni*) and of the bottlenose dolphin (*id-denfil ta' geddumu qasir*) in Maltese waters. The project was led by the Environment and Resources Authority with the participation of KAI Marine Services (Spain) and the Ministry for Sustainable Development, Environment and Climate Change (MSDEC), and the cofinancement of the Bank of Valletta (BOV).

Ms Carmen Mifsud, who was managing the MIGRATE project, said that “the surveys and scientific work carried out throughout the project helped to gather more information on loggerhead turtles and the bottlenose dolphin in Malta, as well as on whales and other dolphins, but it also helped to identify important areas which are hence being proposed as Natura 2000 sites”.

On the other hand, the related EU LIFE+ Malta Seabird Project is the largest seabird conservation project carried out in Malta. Through extensive and innovative research, the project aimed at identifying areas at sea essential for three seabirds in Malta, namely the Yelkouan Shearwater (*il-garnija*), the Scopoli's Shearwater (*iċ-ċiefa*) and the European Storm-petrel (*il-kaŋġu*). This project was led by BirdLife Malta in collaboration with the Ministry for Sustainable Development, Environment and Climate Change (MSDEC), the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Sociedade Portuguesa para o Estudo das Aves (SPEA). The Environment and Resources Authority has indicated that “The Authority has worked with MSDEC and the LIFE+ Malta Seabirds project so as to propose sites important for such seabirds as Natura 2000 sites, and will now endeavour to work with all relevant stakeholders to ensure the setting up of adequate and sustainable management measures for these sites”.

In this respect, it is common misconception that sites listed as protected areas are no-go areas. This is in fact not true; neither does it mean that no fishing can take place there. Malta is expected to monitor and manage these sites in a sustainable manner, making sure that protected populations in these areas are safeguarded for future generations.