

## **DETERMINING SENSITIVITY CRITERIA OF SALIENT SPECIES AND HABITATS: CONVERGING SCIENCE AND MANAGEMENT FOR CONSERVATION**

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The conservation of wild living resources is a recurrent theme present in the environmental strategies developed worldwide during the last decades and which reflects the growing concern over the alarming rate of biodiversity loss. The protection of marine species and habitats of conservation interest is therefore a matter of great concern in a basin such as the Mediterranean characterised by high biodiversity and human pressure. The development of protection strategies requires the identification of the major pressures affecting living resources and the identification of mitigation measures necessary for the recovery of species and habitats of conservation interest. On the basis of studies concerning the procedures involved in the development of zoning plans for Marine Protected Areas, ICRAM has identified the need to select the sensitivity criteria of salient species and habitats. The present work outlines the sensitivity criteria of marine protected / rare species and marine habitats of conservation interest, with a view to identifying the strategies required for their protection. The sensitivity criteria are formulated by analysing the threats concerning protected / rare marine species or of habitats and biocoenoses of conservation interest in the Mediterranean. The threats are identified as factors having a known negative effect on the biology and conservation status of a species or habitat. The conservation needs for each species and habitat are subsequently deduced from the above mentioned threats and classified into categories involving human usage and limitations of the marine environment. The resulting process yields the identification of three macroscopic conservation needs, namely the mitigation of the effects of human access, of interactions resulting from take activities, and of wide-range human activities resulting in habitat degradation. The conservation needs, required to protect species and habitats, may be satisfied through the establishment of different levels of habitat protection and use, conferred through restrictions and regulations. This approach is useful in a marine protected area zoning process geared at regulating access and take sensitive areas strategic for conservation.