

## **Nomadic giants off the Greek coasts. Will we allow them to survive?**

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Sperm whales are the largest toothed animals on the planet. They constitute a living legend as globally important species of marine biodiversity, apart having gained the place of a legend figure in literature as Moby Dick. With more than twenty deep feeding dives daily from the surface waters to the abyss, at depths of 1000m or more, they are the most important link between the deep bathypelagic ecosystems and the surface waters. Their existence is essential for the stability of the marine, but also land ecosystems. Few people are aware of the presence of the 'animal of superlatives' in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. The discovery of their presence was made back in 1998 by the Pelagos Cetacean Research Institute and since then the knowledge on this population unit increased significantly. It is a small population of about 200 individuals, but yet a very important piece of the European and Mediterranean wildlife, which is exposed to a number of anthropogenic threats: plastic debris, noise pollution, driftnets and most importantly heavy shipping. Ship strikes, collisions of the animals with large commercial ships crossing the core of their habitat, is the primary cause of decline for this small and vulnerable population unit. Actions to be taken have been studied, proposed and tested, but implementation by the authorities is still lacking.