



## Cyclades LIFE: A ground-breaking initiative for sustainable growth and the conservation of nature in the Cyclades

Participatory procedures, co-management of fisheries grounds, alternative sources of income for the local communities of Andros and Syros in the Cyclades island complex of Greece, but also conservation of nature are the main goals of the innovative new project “Cyclades LIFE” that has just kicked off.

More specifically, the “Cyclades LIFE” project aims at creating a marine protected area (MPA) around the Natura site of Gyaros (a deserted islet – former exile site), under a management plan that will promote local growth in adjacent communities, support sustainable fisheries and protect biodiversity. “The new marine protected area will be designed with a holistic and interdisciplinary approach and use a pioneering methodology” notes Dr. Spyros Kotomatas of WWF Greece, coordinator of the project. “Its goal is to function based on a participatory system of co-management with the active participation and contribution of all the involved and interested stakeholders such as fishermen, local administration, representatives from the tourist sector from Andros, Syros and Athens to name but a few”. Therefore, the unique marine biodiversity of the broader area of Gyaros, such as *Posidonia* beds, reefs, as well as one of the most important populations of the critically endangered Mediterranean monk seal will be protected, while in parallel local communities will benefit. If the whole project is successful in creating an effective and sustainable marine protected area, its impact may extend across the wider Cyclades island complex and such a model MPA can be utilized throughout the Mediterranean region.

Partners in the above endeavour for the next 4 years will be the Ministry of the Environment, Energy and Climate Change, the Decentralized Administration Authority of the Aegean, the Development Corporation of Local Authorities of Cyclades S.A, Charokopeion University, the Italian Tethys Research Institute and the NGOs MOM/Hellenic Society for the Study and Protection of the Monk Seal and WWF Greece.

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