



Formicula 'shielded' ahead of summer: What the Ministerial Decision foresees for its urgent protection

According to the recently issued Ministerial Decision 123711/3066 (Official Government Gazette 953/31.12.2024), a 200-meter restricted access zone shields the 8.7-hectare Formicula islet in the Inner Ionian Archipelago; a vital refuge for the Mediterranean monk seal that is now under protection against unregulated tourism.

The Decision marks a milestone for the rich ecosystem of the area and for the Mediterranean monk seals themselves, which should be able now to rest, feed, and reproduce undisturbed in Formicula, even during the summer months!

It also serves as an inflection point for the joint ongoing efforts by the **environmental organisation iSea**, the **Blue Marine Foundation**, and the **Tethys Research Institute**, who have been systematically working in the area to highlight the need for its effective protection, as well as for the **local stakeholders** joining us in demanding the immediate adoption of protection measures for Formicula through our joint letter to the Ministry of Environment and Energy.

Surrounded by striking rocky reefs, caves, sandy seabeds, and Posidonia meadows, Formicula is an important biodiversity refuge in the Ionian Sea. **Unregulated tourism** activities were a great cause of concern for the protection of this biodiversity hotspot and its locally abundant wildlife. The measures included in this new Ministerial Decision contribute to sustainable tourism and environmental protection. The fact that a large number of tourism businesses support this initiative offers a promising scenario.

Mediterranean monk seals in Formicula have been systematically monitored by the Tethys Research Institute for over a decade. The regular presence of this charismatic and highly threatened species not only led to an increase in visitors and tourists but also drew the interest of the scientific community, the local society, and the State itself. Formicula's ecological importance prompted to the development of multidisciplinary **scientific research**, resulting in **data that supported the issuance of the Ministerial Decision**.

Although we are very excited about this important step we have achieved, the Ministerial Decision leaves some issues unresolved regarding the full protection of Formicula, as it does not regulate, but subordinates fishing to an upcoming "Special Environmental Study". Despite Formicula is not an important fishing ground for the local community, the empty gap in regards to fishing regulations left in the Ministerial Decision raises concerns about how effective these measures will finally be.

According to Ioannis Giovos, Conservation Officer of the environmental organisation iSea, "*A catalyst for the steps taken towards the protection of Formicula is the meaningful and long-standing collaboration among iSea, the Blue Marine Foundation, and the Tethys Research Institute, as well as our shared sense of responsibility for environmental protection. The natural wealth of Formicula inspired a common vision for its preservation and united our voices with various stakeholders from the local community, forming a collective effort built on continuous communication, transparency, trust, and the active involvement of stakeholders at every stage of this process*".



The future generations were equally active in advocating for its protection with 23 letters sent by kids to the Ministry of the Environment and Energy asking for Formicula's urgent protection measures. They are our greatest motivation to ensure that one of the Ionian Sea's key wildlife refuges will be truly protected.

According to Joan Gonzalvo, Director of the [Ionian Dolphin Project](#), run by [Tethys Research Institute](#), *"The announcement of this protection measures are a first step toward achieving our shared goal of protecting this hotspot for biodiversity in the centre of the charming Ionian islands. The regulations included in this Ministerial Decision should be timely translated into effective conservation action to prevent them from becoming another example of "conservation on paper"!*

This Ministerial Decision marks a significant step forward and calls for continuous efforts by all of us to make sure it leads to long-lasting conservation action.

Let's work together this summer to ensure measures are implemented to Protect Formicula!

Find more about the area: <https://isea.com.gr/formicula-islet/?lang=en>

Find the Ministerial decision: <https://isea.com.gr/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/20240400953.pdf>

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