



## PRESS RELEASE

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### Minister to Unveil Special Statue of Monk Seals

The Minister for Heritage, the Environment and Climate Change, Prof John Cortes, will unveil a special statue of a Monk Seal mother and pup on Wednesday 20th September, at 7 p.m. at the 2nd Europa Advance Battery.

The location, soon to become the Viewing Platform for the Gorham's Cave Complex World Heritage Site, has been specially selected as it overlooks a site known to have been occupied historically by this now-rare Mediterranean marine mammal.

The unveiling is part of an awareness campaign which is being promoted by the Italian Gruppo Foca Monaca-Onlus. The Group was initiated following the international alarm for the risk of extinction of the Mediterranean Monk Seal. This is the only seal species that lives in the Mediterranean and it is classified as the most threatened mammal in Europe and one of the rarest in the world. From about 300 individuals left in the 70's, the number is now believed to reach about 700 individuals.

After the installation of similar sculptures on the island of Marettimo in Italy, and on the island Vis in Croatia, two new sculptures are being installed now, one on the Greek island of Othoni, and the one in Gibraltar, in collaboration with the Gibraltar Museum. The aim of this initiative is to establish relationships of friendship between the various small Mediterranean communities that are united by an 'unusual destiny': that of having hosted in old times, and in some cases even today, the very rare seal.

The idea of spreading small statues to local coastal communities of the Mediterranean where the presence of the Monk Seal was well-documented in the past, was presented by Marco De Salvo, and supported by the Gruppo Foca Monaca. The first statue was placed in Marettimo. Made of natural basaltic stone, by the Tarquinian artist Guilio Cosini Bagada, it is now housed in the main harbour square in the small island off the west coast of Sicily.

The statue to be unveiled in Gibraltar, of an adult seal kissing and protecting her pup, is a symbolic image also reproduced by Guilio Cosini Bagada sculpting the rock. The sculpture was supervised by Emanuele Coppola, a wild-life film maker, and head of the Gruppo Foca Monaca. Mr Coppola

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will be present at the ceremony along with Count Louis Vitetti Martini who has sponsored the statues.

The unveiling will be part of a series of events this week, which includes a symposium on species reintroductions and tracking followed by the Calpe Conference on re-wilding, events organised by The Gibraltar Museum, and supported by the Ministry for Heritage, Environment and Climate Change. Commenting ahead of the unveiling, Prof Cortes expressed his delight at the opportunity of having the sculpture in Gibraltar. Being one of only four locations in the Mediterranean it highlights once again Gibraltar's prominent role in the field of nature conservation and its place within the Mediterranean community.