GLOBAL DECLARATION FOR RIVER DOLPHINS

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Ganges & Indus river dolphins in India

Recent achievements
CMS Concerted Action adopted to secure the connectivity of riverine habitat within range countries and trans boundary regions of Bangladesh, India and Nepal.

- National Ganges river dolphin population survey carried out in all the river dolphin ranges 8950 km and 28 rivers

Legislation & frameworks
- 2020: Launch of Project Dolphin by Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to conserve river & marine dolphins
- The Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022 includes Gangetic River Dolphin (Platanista gangetica) and Indus river Dolphin (Platanista minor) as two different species in Schedule I of the Act.
- A Comprehensive Action Plan for Project Dolphin (2022-2047) has been prepared.
- Ministry has constituted the Project Dolphin Steering Committee in pursuance of the recommendation of the Committee of Secretaries
- Committee for identifying riverine dolphin research gaps constituted – Committee has already submitted a report on the research gaps
- Ban on single use plastics
- Coast Guards empowered under Wildlife Protection Act (relevant for estuarine dolphins)
- Financial support to Dolphin Range States has been provided for the year 2022-2023 to carry out Dolphin and aquatic habitat focused activities
- Training and capacity building for staff to monitor aquatic habitats
- States of Assam, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar Punjab have identified dolphin hotspots
- Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying - Supporting in improving livelihood opportunities of Fisherfolks; Enhancing fisheries conservation thereby creating adequate prey-base for Dolphins; Supporting fisheries related activities for By-catch reduction and unintended entanglement of Dolphins in fishing nets and with schemes such as Mtsy Sampa Yojana
- The theme for Wildlife Week, 2023 was “Conservation of Dolphins and Associated aquatic species” Under this various activities have carried out to promote and conserve river dolphin in its natural ranges in its range states
- Ministry of Jal Shakti via their active work provide monitoring on maintenance of water flow in rivers and management and abatement of riverine pollution
- Field guide for monitoring Ganges & Indus river dolphins released. Range wide population completed.
- Development of ‘Dolphin Mitra’ for promoting and conservation of Dolphins in their States
- Citizen science-based monitoring process for aquatic biodiversity river and marine health has been developed
Progress and its Enlightenment of Conservation of the Yangtze Finless Porpoise

Three Conservation Measures

- In-situ Conservation to protect the natural habitat and population
- Natural ex-situ Conservation to secure population seeds
- Captive Breeding & Research for technical support and public education.

Well-managed protected areas for the Yangtze finless porpoise in China

- 10 PAs have been established, covering about 40% of the distribution area, and protecting 60-80% of the population.
- The multi-party collaboration mechanism has been gradually improved to promote the effectiveness of protection and management.
- CA/RDS Lite assessment report showed China has achieved high score on PA-management.

Translocation approach preserves spark of hope for Yangtze finless porpoise

- Since 1990, porpoises have been relocated to safer areas (oxbow lakes), with less threats (no navigation/less under water noise, sand mining, and fishing activities).
- In 2015, another two trans-located populations were established, all of which have developed naturally breeding populations, and are now protecting more than 150 porpoises. Individual exchange program among reserves has been established as well.
- In 2023, four porpoises from Tian-e-Zhou Oxbow Reserve were successfully “soft” released into the mainstem of the Yangtze River.

Captive breeding and research

- Since 1996, captive breeding of the Yangtze finless porpoise has been conducted, and four individuals have successfully been born and survived, with two of them are descendants of the first born in captivity.
- A relatively complete captive breeding technology system has been established, providing strong support for the conservation of wild populations and public awareness education.

Yanze River Protection-Unprecedented National Action

- The Yangtze Protection Law, the first basin level management law in China, was put into practice in 2021. It provides the most solid guarantee for the protection and management of the Yangtze finless porpoise's habitat.
- The 10-year fishing ban, started in 2020, has significantly helped the recovery of fish stocks and has alleviated the pressure for fish bait for the Yangtze finless porpoise, and almost ceased the harm from fishery on the porpoises.
Ganges river dolphins in Bangladesh

Ganges river dolphin (*Platanista gangetica*)
IUCN conservation status: Endangered
Population size & trend: unknown
Where: Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna, and the Sangu-Karnaphuli river systems

Key threats:
[Example: Habitat loss and fragmentation due to construction of dams and barrages, unregulated and unsustainable fishing, entanglement in fishing nets, stranding in irrigation canals and seasonal lakes, pollution]

Recent achievements
Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) Concerted Action adopted to secure the connectivity of riverine habitat within range countries and transboundary regions of Bangladesh, India and Nepal.

Ongoing collaboration with fishing communities for sustainable fishing practices and alternative livelihoods.

Legislation & frameworks
• First national conservation Action Plan (2020-2030) defined for the Ganges river dolphin. This was endorsed by the government in 2021.

Important for the future
• National population survey and estimation
Irrawaddy dolphins in Cambodia

Irrawaddy dolphin (*Orcaella brevirostris*)
IUCN conservation status: Critically Endangered
Population size & trend: 89 individuals (2020 estimate). Since 2007, populations have appeared to stabilise
Where: Mekong river basin

Recent achievements
- Government commitment to not construct hydrological dams along the Mekong River mainstem in the next 10 years.
- Community-based river guards protect the river dolphin ranges from illegal fishing.

Legislation & frameworks
- The revised law on fisheries
- The Sub-Decree on the Mekong Dolphin Management and Protection Zone
- The Sub-Decree on Determination of Types of Fisheries and Endangered Fisheries Products
- The Proclamation of the Cambodia’s Ministry of Agriculture, on the Measures to Protect Endangered Fisheries Products
- The Mekong Dolphin Conservation Strategy
- The 2024-2028 Management and Conservation Plan for Irrawaddy Dolphins and biodiversity along the Mekong River in Kratie and Stung Treng Provinces

Important for the future
A 2024 Mekong Dolphin Population Report

Threats:
Entanglement in fishing nets, electric fishing practices and change of water flow

Encouraging results from CAJRDS Lite preliminary assessment of management practices. Carried out in the key site where river dolphins live (>90% of river dolphin population).

Monitoring technique based on the identification of individual river dolphins

Historical increase of the Mekong dolphin population from 80 in 2015 to 92 individuals in 2017 and stabilization of this population in 2020

A 2024 Mekong Dolphin Population Report
Irrawaddy dolphin in Indonesia

**LOCATION**

**Mahakam river basin**

- **Mouth Location:** 920 km
- **Watershed Size Total:** 7,872,593.35 km²
- **The Mahakam Delta Area:** 13,000 ha

**Aquatic Conservation Area**

- **Core Area:** 1,387,209 ha
- **Expansionary Buffer Heating Zones:** 1,000 km
- **Inception Buffer Heating Zones:** 500 km

**LEGISLATION & FRAMEWORKS**

- **Indonesian Law & Regulation**
  - Article 24 of GMP 2010
  - Act No. 26 of 2007 on Conservation of Marine Ecosystems
  - Act No. 7 of 2014 on Conservation of Marine Mammals

- **AQUATIC CONSERVATION AREA**

- **BUFFERZONE**

- **170,000 km² of Fossil Mahakam - irrawaddy dolphin habitat**

**THREATS**

- Conversion of swamps
- Loss of fish breeding areas
- Reduced fish resources
- Chemical pollution & plastics
- Unsustainable fishing
- Noise pollution
- Boat collision

**RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS**

- **Pingers**
  - Innovation for tackling threats

- **Community Involvement and Partnership**
  - Local community-based patrol to monitor dolphin population
  - 100% of the local community has received training in dolphin conservation

- **Industries & Fertilizer**
  - 2020: One protected area for dolphin protection established
  - 2023: 10 protected areas established

- **Population and Water Quality Monitoring**
  - Regular monitoring of dolphin population
  - Water quality monitoring

- **Water pollution**
  - Monitoring of water pollution in the mahakam river

**IMPORTANT FOR THE FUTURE**

- **Management plan for**
  - Conservation area in Mahakam river of upper region of Kotal Kartanegara Districts (BPSPL, KKP 2023-2024)

- **Gillnet restrictions**
  - Prohibiting uncontrolled nets and netbank crossings

- **D造林 planning to protect dolphins**

- **Effective evaluation**
  - Monitoring and evaluation of dolphin population

- **Water pollution**
  - Monitoring and evaluation of water pollution

**ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION**

- **53 SEDM**

**MORTALITY & CAUSATION**

- **Mortality Cause & Rates**
  - 1995: 4%
  - 2022: 7%

- **Direct mortality**
  - 70% - Gillnet entanglement

**POPULATION**

- **BIRTH RATE**
  - 4 - 7 per year

**PROBABLY THE MOST ENDANGERED WILDLIFE**

- **Irrawaddy dolphin**
  - **Population size trend:** Critical Endangered
  - **Total: 1,000**
  - **Estimated 2022:** 7%

**Indonesia's irrawaddy dolphin**

- **BIOGRAPHY**
  - **Scientific Name:** Orcaella brevirostris
  - **Local Name:** Pesut Manakam

**A MODERN APPROACH TO CONSERVATION**

- **Innovative solutions to critical challenges**

**CA/RDS ASSESSMENT IN MAHAKAM WATERSHED**

- **SUSTAINABLE INCOME GENERATION OPPORTUNITIES**

- **Post-harvest**
  - Fish pre-processing for domestic export
- **Eco-tourism**
  - Dolphin watching trips

**FUTURE PLANS**

- **Environmental education module**

**2022-2024: Ready area for irrawaddy dolphins declared**

- **Water pollution in mahakam river**

- **Population size trend**
  - **Critical Endangered**
  - **Total: 1,000**
**RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS**

- Concrete conservation efforts spanning over decades have bent the curve for the Indus River dolphin; from 1200 to 2000 in 2001.

- Research established the Indus river dolphin as a separate species, providing an important opportunity to strengthen conservation efforts for this endemic species.

- Technology-based solutions, such as pingers, piloted to reduce dolphin entrapment in fishing nets, irrigation canals and shallow water bodies.

- Friends of Indus Dolphin engaging and fostering community stewardship, enhancing their motivation for protecting the Indus River dolphin.

- Coordinated efforts contributed to the rescue and safe release of 41 dolphins between 2019 and 2022, bringing the total number rescued to 184.

- Fisher communities, students, and members of civil society continuously engaged to foster awareness awareness for dolphin conservation and protection.

- 2022: 10 year ban on the use of gillnets in the Punjab Province.

- The Indus River dolphin will be showcased in the upcoming release of the BBC Planet Earth 3 Series which will released on November 12, 2023.

**INDUS RIVER DOLPHIN IN PAKISTAN**

**Indus river dolphin** (*Platanista minor*)

**IUCN conservation status:** Endangered (EN)

**Population size and trend:** 1,987 individuals (estimate from 2017-2018), and increasing trend

**Location:** Indus river basin.

**IMPORTANT FOR THE FUTURE**

Working to enhance the conservation profile of the Indus river dolphin and its habitat internationally through coordinated efforts to designate priority dolphin habitats as Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs).

**THREATS**

Habitat loss and fragmentation due to construction of dams and barrages, unregulated and unsustainable fishing, entanglement in fishing nets, stranding in irrigation canals and seasonal lakes, pollution.

**LEGISLATION AND FRAMEWORKS**

- National Wildlife Policy 2021
- The Punjab Wildlife (Protection, Preservation, Conservation and Management Act, 2007
- The Punjab Protected Areas Act 2020
- Fisheries legislation related to sustainable fisheries management
- The Sindh Fisheries (Amendment) Act, 2011
- Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Fisheries and Aquaculture Act, 2022.
- The Punjab Fisheries (Amendment) Ordinance 2007
Ganges river dolphins in Nepal

Ganges river dolphin (Platanista gangetica)
IUCN conservation status: Endangered (EN)
National Status: Critically Endangered
Population size & trend: 52 (2016), trend unknown
Where: Koshi, Narayani and Karnali river systems

Threats:
Lack of awareness, illegal and destructive fishing, pollution, unsustainable river aggregates mining, limited livelihood options of river dependent communities, water related infrastructures

Recent achievements
- Research underway into river dolphin migration between Nepal and India using innovative underwater monitoring devices.
- Community river stretch co-management group formation initiated.
- 10 point resolution on dolphin conservation signed in Tikapur, Kailali.
- Narayani River Health Assessment conducted.
- Regular Narayani River Clean-up campaign initiated.
- Narayani River Conclave 2023 organized [Healthy Rivers: Healthy Lives].

Legislation & frameworks
- First National River Dolphin Conservation Action plan (2021-2025) endorsed by the government
- National Park and Wildlife Protection Act, 1973: Protected Wildlife and Hunting Prohibited
- Aquatic Animals Protection (1st amendment) Act, 1997 prohibited intentional catching, killing and wounding
- National Fishery Development Policy, 2022

Important for the future
- National population survey and estimation
- Declaration priority dolphin habitat as Dolphin Sanctuary
Irrawaddy river dolphin

Less than 80 individuals left in Myanmar (2020)
Distributed along the Irrawaddy river stretches
Key threats: Unsustainable fishing, river pollution

**Dolphin Guardian Initiative**: Engage with local fisherfolks to monitor dolphin mortality and threats and raise awareness for sustainable fishing practices.

- 24 fishers volunteered as dolphin guardians
- Dolphin mortality reduced from 10 in FY21 to 1 in FY23

**Dolphin Conservation Alliance**

- 5 NGOs (WWF, WCS, FFI, WorldFish, and Burma Dolphin) joined hands to collaborate on river dolphin conservation;
- Regular sharing information on dolphins, threats, and mitigation measures
- Future plan on joint population monitoring
Amazon river dolphins in Bolivia

Amazon river dolphin subspecies, the Bolivian bufeo (*Inia geoffrensis boliviensis*)

IUCN conservation status: Endangered

Population size & trend: >3000 and constant

Where: Amazon river basin

Key threats:
Degradation and loss of aquatic ecosystems, habitat contamination, poor practices in the use of hydrobiological resources

Recent achievements

- 3 Amazon basins declared Ramsar sites - bufeo distribution area -
- Participatory monitoring of the Bolivian bufeo and the quality of aquatic ecosystems -fishermen-
- Movements and distribution area of Bolivian bufeo monitored with satellite transmitters

Legislation & frameworks

- National law declaring natural heritage to the Bolivian bufeo
- National law on sustainable fishing and aquaculture
- National strategy for the conservation and management of Ramsar sites and wetlands in the country
- National bufeo conservation plans
- Red Book of Vertebrates of Bolivia

Importance for the future

- Improve knowledge about population dynamics, ecology, human-cattle interaction and their prey, and ecosystem health.
- Recognition of the species Inia boliviensis, Bolivian bufeo, internationally.
Amazon river dolphins & Tucuxi in Brazil

Amazon river dolphin (*Inia geoffrensis*)
Tucuxi (*Sotalia fluviatilis*)
IUCN conservation status: Endangered
Population size & trend: unknown
Where: Amazon, Orinoco, and Tocantins-Araguaia river basins

Recent achievements

- 2023 unlimited term extension to the implemented moratorium on catching piracatinga fish (IBAMA 2015), for which Amazon river dolphins are often used as bait.
- 2023 PRIM-HA Plan to Reduce Impacts of Hydroelectric Power Plants on Biodiversity in the Amazon
- 2023 Amazon Summit Belém do Pará - CMP River Dolphin are a priority

Threats:
Habitat loss and fragmentation due to construction of dams and barrages, unregulated and unsustainable fishing, entanglement in fishing nets, hydric stress, uncontrolled touristic interaction.

Legislation & frameworks

- 2019: National Aquatic species Action Plan defined, including river dolphins; 2019 specific PAN to Amazonian Aquatic Mammals threatened.

Important for the future:

- Increase in researches about population dynamics, ecology, interactions with humans, aquatic mammal health
- Recognition of the Araguaian boto (*Inia araguaiaensis*) at international level.
Amazon river dolphins & Tucuxi in Ecuador

**Amazon river dolphin (Inia geoffrensis)**
**Tucuxi (Sotalia fluviatilis)**

*IUCN conservation status: Endangered*
*Population size & trend: unknown*
*Where: Amazon river basin*

**Recent achievements**

- We obtain information on a national scale in the main water basins where river dolphins live that allows us to generate strategies for their protection and conservation based on scientific evidence.
- We implement a standardized methodology through the strengthening of technical and operational capacities at a national scale for the participatory monitoring of river dolphins.
- We developed a program for the management and mitigation of river dolphin mortality, strengthening the capacities of the country's protected areas such as the Yasuní National Park and the Cuyabeno Fauna Production Reserve.
- In collaboration with the National Biodiversity Institute and with the support of WWF, the first National Database of river dolphin records in Ecuador was consolidated.
- We strengthened the knowledge of local communities and indigenous peoples for the conservation of river dolphins through the creation of a Protocol for the Responsible Viewing of River Dolphins.

**Legislation & frameworks**

- We implement strategic actions of the National Action Plan (2012-2027) for the Conservation of Aquatic Mammals, including river dolphins.
- We developed the Management Plan for the Cuyabeno Fauna Production Reserve, which defines river dolphins as a conservation value of the Protected Area.
- In 2017, the Lagartococha-Cuyabeno-Yasuní area was declared a Ramsar site, -773,668.5 ha
- In 2021, together with the International Whaling Commission, we participated in the development of the Management Plan for the Conservation of South American River Dolphins.

**Important for the future**

- Strengthening work with local communities in the territory and maintaining interinstitutional cooperation at the national and regional levels.

**Threats:**
- Mining and oil pollution, pesticides, untreated domestic and industrial sewage water
- Unregulated and unsustainable tourism and fisheries
- Deliberate killing of dolphins for illegal traffic
- Waterways, deregulated navigation
Amazon river dolphins & Tucuxi in Colombia

Amazon river dolphin (*Inia geoffrensis*)
Tucuxi (*Sotalia fluviatilis*)
IUCN conservation status: Endangered
Population size & trend: unknown
Where: Amazon & Orinoco river basins

**Recent achievements**
- 3 Ramsar sites in key dolphin distribution areas (1 million hectares)
- 365 Protected Areas in the Amazon (63) and Orinoco (302)
- 9 OMEC’s (Amazon and Orinoco)
- 1 National Aquatic Mammals Management Plan and 2 regional action plans for river dolphins (Cormacarena, Corporinoquia).
- Fisheries agreements in the three Ramsar Sites guaranteeing the effective participation of local communities.
- Sustainable dolphin watching / more than 1200 trained local guides / 7 prioritized sites for these activities in Colombia.
- Flooded Forest restoration program (Lagos de Tarapoto and Bita River Ramsar Sites).
- River dolphin abundance monitoring program (Amazon and Orinoco).
- River dolphin satellite tagging program (28 dolphins).
- River dolphin health assessment.

**Legislation & frameworks**
- Resolution 1912 of 2017 listing the threatened species *Inia geoffrensis* and *Sotalia fluviatilis* (Updating).
- Ramsar sites declaration and fisheries agreements

**Important for the future**
- Implementation of the national action plan and Conservation Management Plan (CMP)
- Strengthen actions for the conservation of aquatic ecosystems.
- Regional and international articulation and coordination in the framework of treaties and conventions.
- Generate a collaborative dialogue to effectively conserve river dolphins and their habitats within the framework of the declaration.

**Threats:**
- Deforestation
- Conflicts with fisheries
- Climate change – water stress
- Water pollution – Mercury/ Hydrocarbons
- Loss of river connectivity due to hydroelectric plants
Amazon river dolphins & grey dolphins in Peru

Amazon river dolphin (*Inia geoffrensis*)
Grey dolphin (*Sotalia fluviatilis*)
IUCN conservation status: Endangered
Population size & trend: Unknown
Where: Amazon river basin

**Threats:**
Entanglement in fishing nets, inappropriate fishing practices, pollution.

**Recent achievements**
- Population studies in 3 prioritized basins (Napo, Amazon and Ucayali) between 2021 and 2022; 1,032 dolphins were observed in 1,726 km of river.
- Bycatch diagnosis in 2020 and 2023, with 379 interviews with fishermen in Ucayali and Loreto.
- Pingers were tested in a pilot study in Caballococha (Loreto) with a reduction of dolphin’s approach to nets by 38%.
- In 2023 a pilot study for the use of passive acoustic monitoring devices for river dolphins took place; 108.6 hours of recording, analysis still in process.
- Between 2018 and 2021, 11 dolphins were tagged with satellite transmitters for habitat use and migration patterns studies.
- In 2023, the first Workshop on the “prevention and reduction of river dolphin bycatch and good fishing practices” was carried in Ucayali, with participation of the local government and fishermen organizations.

**Legislation & frameworks**
- Law Nº 26585 - Law that declares dolphins and other marine mammals as legally protected species.
- Supreme Decree Nº 015-2009-PRODUCE - Fisheries management regulations for the Peruvian Amazon.
- In 2021 the International Whaling Commission (IWC) adopted the Amazon River Dolphin Conservation Management Plan (CMP).

**Important for the future**
- Inclusion of river dolphins as research and conservation priorities in protected areas.
- Strengthen fishing monitoring and control.
- Update of the National Action Plan for the Conservation of River Dolphins and Amazonian Manatees.
Amazon river dolphins in Venezuela

Amazon river dolphin (*Inia geoffrensis*)
IUCN conservation status: Endangered
Population size & trend: Unknown
Where: Amazon and Orinoco river basins

**Threats:**
Habitat loss and fragmentation due to construction of dams and barrages, unregulated and unsustainable fishing, entanglement in fishing nets, hunting, pollution

**Recent achievements**
- 2021-2023: Abundance estimation survey in Casiquiare Capanaparo, Cinaruco (National Park Santos Luzardo), Apure & Portuguesa rivers.
- Alliances with communities and regional environmental entities for the development of responsible river dolphin watching tourism.
- Alliances for the execution of expeditions in cross-border rivers between Venezuela and Colombia

**Legislation & frameworks**
- Environmental criminal law

**Important for the future**
- Complete the national population survey and estimate and begin researching population trends in the identified vulnerable areas, guaranteeing continuity in the alliance between environmental institutions and communities for the implementation of conservation projects.

Health evaluation and installation of TAG’s was carried out on individuals from the Amazonian Casiquiare River and samples were taken to elucidate the genetic identity of this population.

For the first time, an event was held to celebrate the World River Dolphin Day which included a photographic exhibition, and it was later exhibited in other regions of Venezuela, accompanied by a lectures.

**Legend**
- *Inia geoffrensis* distribution
- Orinoco basin
- Amazon basin

**Map**
- Alliances for the execution of expeditions in cross-border rivers between Venezuela and Colombia

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**Map**
- Legend:
  - *Inia geoffrensis* distribution
  - Orinoco basin
  - Amazon basin