



**CONVENTION ON
MIGRATORY
SPECIES**

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Agenda Item 27.5

SIRENIANS, PINNIPEDS AND OTTERS

(Prepared by the Secretariat)

Summary:

This document reports on progress to implement Decisions 13.55 and 13.56 (c), as well as 13.81-13.82, and proposes Decisions for adoption.

Rev.1 makes consistent the language in Decisions directed to the Scientific Council.

SIRENIANS, PINNIPEDS AND OTTERS

Background

1. A mandate¹ to review the regional threats for non-cetacean, CMS-listed, aquatic mammals derives from the Global Programme of Work for Cetaceans (Resolution 10.15), first adopted in 2011, and then carried over into a Decision at COP12. Based on these reviews, the Scientific Council was to prepare a robust assessment of threats and regional priorities as well as work programmes for these non-cetacean aquatic mammal species, to be presented to CMS COP11. Due to lack of funding and capacity, this mandate was not implemented, and was carried forward to Decisions 13.81 and 13.82. The relevant parts are reproduced below:

13.81 Directed to the Aquatic Mammals Working Group of the Scientific Council

The Aquatic Mammals Working Group is requested, subject to the availability of resources, to:

- a) *review the regional threats for the CMS-listed aquatic mammals not included in the Global Programme of Work (POW) for Cetaceans [...];*
- b) *based on this assessment of threats and regional priorities, prepare work programmes for these other aquatic mammal species for consideration by the Scientific Council at its 5th or 6th meeting of the Sessional Committee;*

13.82 Directed to the Scientific Council

The Scientific Council is requested, subject to the availability of resources, to:

- a) *review the assessments of regional threats and resulting work programmes developed by the Aquatic Mammals Working Group and provide recommendations to COP14;*

2. In addition, COP13 in 2020 adopted the following Decisions regarding the Dugong:

13.55 Directed to Parties

Parties that are Range States of Dugong dugon are requested to consider, including consulting the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Dugongs (Dugong dugon) and their Habitats throughout their Range, whether their regional population of the species merits inclusion on Appendix I of CMS.

13.56 Directed to the Scientific Council

- c) *provide advice to Parties on request on the scientific merits of including regional populations of Dugong dugon on Appendix I of CMS.*

3. The CMS Appendices contain four sirenian species, six species of pinnipeds, and two species of otter:

¹ Operative paragraph 8 of Resolution 10.15: "Calls upon the Scientific Council to review the regional threats for the remaining CMS-listed aquatic mammals and prepare for CMS COP11 a robust assessment of threats and regional priorities as well as similar work programmes for these other aquatic mammal species".

Scientific Name	Common Name	Year of App. I listing	Year of App. II listing	Global IUCN Red List Status and Trend
<i>Dugong dugon</i>	Dugong, Sea Cow		1979	VU (decreasing)
<i>Trichechus inunguis</i>	Amazonian Manatee		2002	VU (decreasing)
<i>Trichechus manatus</i>	Manatee	1999	1999	VU (decreasing)
<i>Trichechus senegalensis</i>	West African Manatee	2009	2009	VU (unknown)
<i>Arctocephalus australis</i>	South American Fur Seal		1979	LC (increasing)
<i>Otaria flavescens</i>	South American Sea Lion		1979	LC (stable)
<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	Grey Seal		1985	LC (increasing)
<i>Monachus monachus</i>	Mediterranean Monk Seal	1979	1979	EN (increasing)
<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	Common Seal, Harbour Seal		1985	LC (unknown)
<i>Pusa caspica</i>	Caspian Seal	2017	2017	EN (unknown)
<i>Lontra felina</i>	Marine Otter	1979		EN (decreasing)
<i>Lontra provocax</i>	Southern River Otter	1979		EN (decreasing)

EN = Endangered; VU = Vulnerable; CR = Critically Endangered; DD = Data Deficient

Review of regional threats for the CMS-listed aquatic mammals not included in the Global Programme of Work for Cetaceans and preparation of work programmes

4. No progress has been made in implementing the relevant activities in Decision 13.81 (a) and (b) due to a lack of resources and capacity. Accordingly, the Scientific Council was also unable to implement Decision 13.82 (a).
5. The sections below provide background information on why these reviews, and the ensuing recommendations, are still needed.

Possible inclusion of regional populations of *Dugong dugon* on Appendix I of CMS

6. The mandate given to the Scientific Council in Decision 13.56 (c) can be considered fulfilled due to action undertaken by the Dugong MOU Technical Advisory Group and the Secretariat, as outlined below.

Sirenians

7. The Sirenia, commonly referred to as sea cows or sirenians, are an order of fully aquatic, herbivorous mammals that inhabit swamps, rivers, estuaries, marine wetlands and coastal marine waters. The extant Sirenia comprise two distinct families, Dugongidae (the Dugong and the now extinct Steller's Sea Cow) and Trichechidae (manatees, namely the Amazonian Manatee, West Indian Manatee and West African Manatee), with a total of four species, all listed on the CMS Appendices.
8. The Dugong (*Dugong dugon*) is the only herbivorous mammal that is strictly marine and the only extant species in the family Dugongidae. It is listed as 'Vulnerable' to extinction at a global scale by the IUCN. However, regional populations of Dugongs are likely to be at higher risk of extinction. The Dugong has a large range that spans close to 40 countries and territories, and includes tropical and subtropical coastal and island waters

from East Africa to Vanuatu, between about 26° north and south of the Equator. Dugongs are highly dependent on seagrass ecosystems for survival, as this is their main food source. The vast majority of Dugongs are found in Australia, with a population of approximately 165,000 according to the [Australian State of the Environment Report](#). Outside Australia, there is also a significant Dugong population in the Arabian Gulf – around several thousand individuals. In 2022, Dugongs were declared as functionally extinct in China.

9. CMS has one agreement in place for the conservation of Dugongs, the [Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Dugongs \(*Dugong dugon*\) and their Habitats throughout their Range](#). The MOU has 27 signatories and aims to promote internationally coordinated actions to ensure the long-term survival of Dugongs and their seagrass habitats throughout their extensive range.
10. A review of the scientific merits of including regional populations of *Dugong dugon* in Appendix I of CMS, as requested by Decision 13.55, is helpful as the population of Dugongs is fragmented. Although globally it is listed as ‘Vulnerable’ to extinction, some of the regional populations outside Australia are at higher risk of extirpation due to their small population size, potential lack of connectivity to other Dugong populations, and higher localized anthropogenic threats related to loss of seagrass habitat and bycatch from fisheries.
11. In order to address Decision 13.55, the CMS Secretariat, with funding provided by the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi under the Migratory Species Champion Programme, has supported two regional assessments of Dugong populations in East Africa and New Caledonia for the IUCN Red List. During the 2022 update of the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, Dugong populations in East Africa and New Caledonia were categorized as ‘Critically Endangered’ and ‘Endangered’, respectively, although the species remains ‘Vulnerable’ globally. The primary threats are unintentional capture in fishing gear in East Africa, poaching in New Caledonia and injuries sustained from collisions with boats in both locations. In East Africa, oil and gas exploration and production, bottom trawling, chemical pollution, and unauthorized coastal development are damaging and destroying the seagrasses that Dugongs depend on for food. The degradation and loss of seagrasses in New Caledonia is the result of agricultural runoff, pollution from nickel mining and coastal development, and damage from boat anchors. The impacts of climate change present a threat throughout the Dugongs’ wide range.
12. Their ‘Critically Endangered’ and ‘Endangered’ status on the IUCN Red List supports the scientific merits of including regional Dugong populations in CMS Appendix I, a view also shared by the [Technical Advisory Group](#) of the Dugong MOU.
13. Given the extensive work on Dugong populations and the conservation efforts undertaken under the framework of the Dugong MOU, the request in Decision 13.81 (a) is considered fulfilled, and no further reviews by the Scientific Council or its working groups are needed.
14. The West African Manatee is one of three manatee species. Being the most threatened of the three species, as noted by the CMS Scientific Council in 1999, it is listed in Appendix II of the Convention. Among the main threats for this species are the destruction of its natural habitats (mangroves and coastal wetlands) by pollution and overexploitation; and the hunting for meat, leather and oil. A further threat is incidental catch in fishing nets. Despite legal protection under national laws in the Range States, killing and illegal utilization continue, indicating a lack of effective compliance and enforcement.

15. CMS has one agreement in place for conservation of West African manatees, along with other Western African aquatic mammals: the [Memorandum of Understanding concerning the Conservation of the Manatee and Small Cetaceans of Western Africa and Macaronesia](#). It aims to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for manatees and small cetaceans of Western Africa and Macaronesia and their habitats, and to safeguard the associated values of these species for the people of the region.
16. Despite its inclusion in the MOU, not much attention has been given to the species. A review, as foreseen in Decision 13.81, would be useful for all three species of manatee.

Pinnipeds

17. Pinnipeds, which comprise the Walrus, sea lions and fur seals, as well as the earless or true seals, are a widely distributed and diverse group of carnivorous, fin-footed, semi-aquatic mammals. They spend most of their lives in the water, but come ashore to mate, give birth, moult or escape from predators such as sharks and orcas. Seals mainly live in marine environments but can also be found in freshwater.
18. Four of the CMS-listed pinniped species are currently categorized as of 'Least Concern' on the IUCN Red List, with an increasing, stable or unknown population trend. The Mediterranean Monk Seal, while categorized as 'Endangered', was assessed to have an increasing population trend, highlighting the success of the conservation efforts of Range States over many years. Likewise, the Caspian Seal is categorized as 'Endangered', but with the population trend unknown.
19. CMS has two agreements in place for the conservation of pinnipeds:
 - a. The [Agreement on the Conservation of Seals in the Wadden Sea](#) (WSSA), which covers the Harbour Seal and the Grey Seal in a coastal area shared by Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands, is managed by the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat (CWSS). The aim of this trilateral environmental agreement is to cooperate closely to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for the Harbour Seal population of the Wadden Sea. The WSSA contains provisions, among others, on research and monitoring, taking, protection of habitats and awareness-raising.
 - b. The [Memorandum of Understanding concerning Conservation Measures for the Eastern Atlantic Populations of the Mediterranean Monk Seal \(*Monachus monachus*\)](#) is coordinated by the Government of Spain, while CMS provides the Secretariat. The Action Plan, which is part of the MOU, focuses the efforts of the four Signatories (Portugal, Spain, Morocco and Mauritania) on the priority measures needed to address entanglement and mortality in fishing gear, overfishing, hunting and human persecution, pollution, and habitat loss.
20. A review, as envisaged in Decision 13.81, would be useful for the pinniped species or populations not currently covered by CMS agreements, in particular those with a less favourable conservation status. Furthermore, recommendations might be warranted as to whether any additional pinniped species (a total of 36 species are recognized by the IUCN) might meet the criteria for listing in the CMS Appendices and might benefit from being included.

Otters

21. Otters are carnivorous, semi-aquatic mammals. Of the 13 extant otter species, two are listed on CMS Appendix I, both of which are categorized as 'Endangered' by IUCN and with a decreasing population trend.
22. A review of the threats and the identification of the conservation priorities for both listed species should be a matter of urgency. This might include determining whether an Appendix II listing and the development of a regional agreement for these species is warranted. In addition, the review could assess whether any additional species might meet the criteria for listing on the CMS Appendices and might benefit from being included.

Discussion and analysis

23. While cetaceans, as the group of aquatic mammals with the largest number of species listed on the CMS Appendices, have been the subject of several agreements and MOUs, as well as Concerted Actions and a dedicated Global Programme of Work (see [UNEP/CMS/COP14/Doc.27.5.1](#)), some of the listed sirenian and pinniped species or populations, and both listed otter species, have not been subject to specific attention by CMS.
24. A review of the conservation status of these species and the threats across their range was requested already by COP10 in 2011. Given the decreasing population trend for several of these species, assessing their conservation needs is now more urgent than ever. Recommendations based on these reviews would help to focus attention where it is most needed. These tasks therefore remain a priority.

Recommended actions

25. The Conference of the Parties is recommended to:
 - a) adopt the draft Decisions as contained in Annex 1 of this document;
 - b) delete Decisions 13.55, 13.56 (c), 13.81 (a) and (b), and 13.82 (a).

ANNEX 1

DRAFT DECISION(S)

SIRENIANS, PINNIPEDS AND OTTERS

Directed to Parties

14.AA Parties are requested to:

- a) consider the possibility of proposing for listing the East African and New Caledonia Dugong populations, which have been listed as Critically Endangered or Endangered in the IUCN Red List, on Appendix I of CMS;
- b) support the Secretariat in securing the external expertise required to develop draft reviews of conservation status and threats to CMS-listed aquatic mammal species and recommendations for the consideration of the Scientific Council as foreseen in Decision 14.CC.

Directed to non-governmental organizations

14.BB Non-governmental organizations are encouraged to provide in-kind and technical support to the development of draft reviews of conservation status and threats to CMS-listed aquatic mammal species and recommendations.

Directed to the Scientific Council through its Aquatic Mammals Working Group

14.CC (13.81 a) and b)) The Scientific Council through its Aquatic Mammals Working Group is requested to, subject to the availability of resources:

- a) review the regional threats for the CMS-listed aquatic mammals other than cetaceans not included in the Global Programme of Work (POW) for Cetaceans and undertake a revision of the POW leading up to the 14th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP14), including a review of the implementation of the POW to date, preparation of a gap analysis and identification of the priorities going forward, with priority given to species or populations not currently covered by CMS agreements and/or with a less favourable conservation status;
- b) based on this assessment of threats and regional priorities, prepare ~~work programmes~~ detailed recommendations for these other aquatic mammal species for consideration by the Scientific Council;
- c) assess whether any additional sirenian, pinniped or otter species might meet the criteria for listing on the CMS Appendices I or II and might benefit from being so listed.

Directed to the Scientific Council

14.DD (13.82 a) The Scientific Council is requested, ~~subject to the availability of resources,~~ to review the assessments of regional threats and resulting ~~work programmes~~ recommendations developed by the Aquatic Mammals Working Group and provide recommendations to COP14~~5~~.

Directed to the Secretariat

- 14.EE The Secretariat shall, subject to the availability of external resources, facilitate the development of draft reviews of conservation status and threats to CMS-listed aquatic mammal species and recommendations for the consideration of the Scientific Council as foreseen in Decision 14.CC.