



**15th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties
to the Convention on Wetlands**

**“Protecting wetlands for our common future”
Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, 23-31 July 2025**

Resolution XV.21

**Recognition of river dolphins and other inland wetland indicator species for
the conservation and sustainable use of rivers**

1. RECALLING that the Fourth Strategic Plan of the Convention on Wetlands (2016-2024) highlights the three pillars of the Convention: i) the wise use of all wetlands through national plans, policies and legislation, management measures and public education; ii) the designation and sustainable management of suitable wetlands for inclusion in the List of Wetlands of International Importance; and iii) international cooperation on transboundary wetlands and shared species;
2. RECOGNIZING that the network of Wetlands of International Importance (“Ramsar Sites”) and the effective management of these Sites and more broadly the wise use of Ramsar Sites and the world’s other wetlands represent an essential contribution not only to the achievement of Targets 1 to 4 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), but also to other multilateral environmental agreements, such as the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the water-related Conventions, and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), as well as the implementation of cooperation between regions; and notably WELCOMING the recommendations of the CMS Joint Noise Working Group regarding the need to develop specific guidance regarding freshwater cetacean species;
3. Particularly RECALLING that in 2023 the Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Wetlands in the Amazon Basin, of which Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela are members, included 23 Ramsar Sites designated for their importance for river dolphins, and that the Initiative promotes the establishment of corridors that support the ecological connectivity of wetlands in the Amazon Basin, as well as the protection, conservation and restoration of the habitat of indicator species such as river dolphins;
4. RECOGNIZING that coordinating or participating in cooperation platforms (at the site, city, watershed, lake and groundwater basin, country, regional and global scales), including under the CMS, can promote the implementation of management or conservation actions for indicator species such as river dolphins living in rivers and wetlands;

5. RECALLING that the Convention on Wetlands is the lead partner for cooperating in the implementation of wetland-related activities under the CBD and is responsible for providing policy, technical and scientific advice and guidance for that Convention and for enhancing cooperation between the two Conventions at all levels;
6. EMPHASIZING that the Fourth Strategic Plan of the Convention, under its four objectives and 19 specific targets, reflects that for the improvement of Ramsar Sites it is necessary to generate conservation and management measures, under integrated schemes involving the Contracting Parties;
7. RECOGNIZING that river dolphins inhabit major river systems that support the livelihoods of nearly 20% of the world's population and that are subject to increasing pressures and rapid transformation;
8. AWARE that a significant proportion of all human beings currently inhabit wetlands in which indicator species are found which depend on the wetlands to fulfil their life cycles, and that the impacts have caused the categorization of most of these species as globally threatened by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN): for example, in South America, the Amazon river dolphin *Inia geoffrensis*, the Bolivian river dolphin *Inia boliviensis*, the Araguaian river dolphin *Inia araguaiaensis* and the tucuxi *Sotalia fluviatilis*, and in Asia, the Ganges river dolphin *Platanista gangetica*, the Indus river dolphin *Platanista minor*, the Irrawaddy dolphin *Orcaella brevirostris*, the Yangtze finless porpoise *Neophocaena asiaeorientalis* and the Indo-Pacific finless porpoise *Neophocaena phocaenoides* (commonly known in Persian as broad-snouted porpoise), which has been observed in the estuarine waters and the northwestern part of the Persian Gulf, particularly near the the Arvand River and the coasts of Khuzestan Province in the Islamic Republic of Iran;
9. ACKNOWLEDGING that the conservation of inland wetland indicator species also contributes to the strengthening of transboundary cooperation and the advancing of sustainable fisheries and responsible tourism initiatives, directly benefiting the communities that depend on these aquatic ecosystems;
10. RECOGNIZING that river indicator species can and have been used to assess the ecological character of some wetlands; and that the absence or rarity of these species in their natural habitats can be indicative of low ecosystem function owing to high levels of pollution, the reduction of river flows due to the development of infrastructure associated with the distribution of water resources and the energy matrix, and the use of these resources for agricultural activities;
11. NOTING that river dolphins in South America and Asia, and other river indicator species, are sentinel species for the conservation of large wetlands, and RECALLING that Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands have generated instruments such as the Conservation and Management Plan (CMP) for river dolphins in the Amazon, Orinoco and Tocantins-Araguaia river basins under the International Whaling Commission in which Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru cooperate, and the Concerted Action on Gangetic River Dolphins under the CMS in which Bangladesh, India and Nepal cooperate;
12. RECALLING the non-binding Global Declaration for River Dolphins signed in Bogotá, Colombia in October 2023 by Bangladesh, Bolivia, Brazil, Cambodia, Colombia, Ecuador, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Venezuela;

13. NOTING that river dolphins are currently found in at least 29 Ramsar Sites in South America and Asia which cover a total of 27,497,064 hectares;
14. RECALLING that the criteria for the identification and designation of Ramsar Sites reflect the inclusion of species that are threatened, that fulfil ecological roles that maintain biodiversity, that take refuge in wetlands during extreme events and adverse conditions, and wetlands which are home to species listed as endangered or threatened in IUCN Red Lists; and RECOGNIZING that a species considered as a key indicator for the conservation and sustainable use of rivers in one country may not have the same status in another, depending on its habitat, distribution, and rarity across different parts of its range;
15. CONCERNED that climatic disturbances are demonstrably affecting the biological integrity of wetlands and the survival of species depending on them as their habitat, such as their fish and river dolphins, and sometimes causing mass mortalities such as those recorded in 2023 in the Amazon, and that the increase in extreme droughts or floods has led to increased mortality of river indicator species, such as strandings of river dolphins in Asia, as well as increased vulnerability to illegal fishing activities;
16. EMPHASIZING that the implementation of conservation measures around specific indicator species will benefit all other forms of life, as it benefits the fauna and flora species that use the same habitats and sites; and
17. RECOGNIZING that actions for sustainable use around river indicator species which benefit local communities have been promoted in Ramsar Sites such as, for example, responsible nature-watching tourism, the development of fishing agreements along with the promotion of low-impact ferrying and navigation, the restoration of flooded forests, and the use of timber and non-timber products; ALSO RECOGNIZING that Indigenous Peoples and local communities, including women and other vulnerable groups, have a fundamental role in the conservation of these species and their habitats in wetlands; and FURTHER RECOGNIZING the CMS International Guidelines for Sustainable Marine Wildlife Interactions: Boat-Based and In-Water Activities;

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18. DECIDES that this Resolution applies to indicator river species, including *inter alia*, where appropriate and according to national circumstances, river dolphins, river-dwelling otters and the platypus, as well as other river species that serve as indicators of good water quality and a healthy river;
19. ENCOURAGES the Contracting Parties to strengthen their management and conservation actions related to wetland habitats that are essential for indicator species such as river dolphins, and to report on actions in their National Reports to the 16th meeting of the Conference of Contracting Parties (COP16);
20. INVITES the Contracting Parties to consider river indicator species as keystone species for different levels of biodiversity, especially in the management of wetlands and the livelihoods of human communities associated with these ecosystems, and to implement the following actions, as appropriate, and in collaboration with relevant entities at the intergovernmental and national levels:
 - i. Implement measures to effectively manage, conserve, protect, sustainably use and restore habitats of river indicator species, including the creation of a network of protected and

connected riverine and lentic habitats, and increase the effectiveness of their management;

- ii. Promote the development of research by scientific bodies and Indigenous Peoples and local communities on river indicator species and their habitats, and monitoring of threats;
 - iii. Consider actions in Wetlands of International Importance ("Ramsar Sites") and other protected area complexes that benefit local communities through sustainable use that respects the conservation objective of the site, such as responsible observation tourism, fishing framework agreements, restoration of flooded forests and use of timber and non-timber products among others;
 - iv. Strengthen engagement with riparian communities, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, taking into account the inclusive approach to conservation and sustainable use of natural resources;
 - v. Promote in the unprotected areas sustainable use, the application of good fishing practices, including spawning closures, and other economic activities in wetlands within the frame of wise use;
 - vi. Collaborate among Parties to improve the quality and quantity of water in wetlands with river dolphins and indicator species; and
 - vii. Collaborate with partners, financial institutions, civil society organizations and private sector actors to mobilize financial resources from all sources and strengthen technical capacities and voluntary technology transfer on mutually agreed terms as mechanisms for the conservation and monitoring of river indicator species and their habitats;
21. ENCOURAGES the Contracting Parties to coordinate with expert groups, academics, local communities and each other, to promote the conservation of river indicator species such as river dolphins, and the development of activities with the aim of the protection of these species; and
22. ALSO ENCOURAGES the Contracting Parties, with the support of the Secretariat, to establish a mechanism to disseminate best practices and lessons learned on the conservation and monitoring of river dolphins as input for the conservation and monitoring of these species and also of other river indicator species in similar situations and/or in other wetland habitats, subject to the availability of resources.