



Press Brief

**INDIA TO HOST FIRST SOUTH ASIAN DUGONG CONSERVATION
WORKSHOP**

Tuticorin, 6th & 7th June 2011

In a major step towards enhanced regional cooperation for the conservation of the Dugong (Sea Cow), India will host the **first South Asia Sub-Regional Workshop on the Conservation and Management of Dugongs** on 6th and 7th June 2011, in Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu. Policy and conservation management experts from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh will come together to discuss the status of dugong conservation in their respective countries; establish standardized methods to survey dugongs and their habitats; and work towards preparing a coordinated Dugong Conservation and Management Plan in South Asia under the United Nations Environment Programme and the Convention on Migratory Species (UNEP/CMS).

The workshop is being organized jointly by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, and the UNEP/CMS Secretariat, in collaboration with the Wildlife Institute of India. Representatives from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh; the Environment Agency of Abu Dhabi; State Forest Departments; experts and Civil Society Organisations will take part in the workshop.

In his message for the workshop, Minister of Environment and Forests, Jairam Ramesh said *“I am happy that South Asian Range States are coming together for the conservation and management of this shared marine mammal. India has constituted a Task Force for the conservation of dugongs, in order to have a focused conservation approach. We are committed to addressing conservation threats faced by the dugong in our waters, and this workshop will take regional and national agendas forward. But as we know, for the most effective kind of conservation, we need the cooperation of all States in the region, as well as the involvement of local communities.”*

Workshop Agenda

Dugongs are endangered marine mammals that are also found in the South Asian waters of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Believed to have been the origin of mermaid legends, remaining populations are at serious risk of becoming extinct in the next 40 years.



The workshop will:

1. Provide updates on the status of dugong populations and associated habitats
2. Introduce Standardized survey methodologies that will identify key dugong habitats, estimate population numbers and trends, and evaluate impacts including direct harvest, habitat degradation and fisheries by-catch
3. Initiate training and capacity building on monitoring and survey techniques
4. Seek grounds for future collaboration in the fields of both research and management
5. Monitor dugong conservation in the South Asia sub-region

India will also detail the status of the Dugong in the country, and enumerate strategies for its conservation. Importantly, State Forest Departments of Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Andaman and Nicobar will present their comprehensive conservation plan, and provide updates on the status of implementation.

Dugong Conservation in India

Three areas of the Indian coast have remnant populations of Dugongs: the Gulf of Kutch, the Gulf of Mannar and the Palk Bay, and the Andaman and Nicobar waters. However, these populations are threatened by mechanized fishing and illegal hunting, pollution and destruction of coral reefs and sea grass beds.

Dugongs are accorded maximum protection under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 as Schedule I species, and are classified as vulnerable to extinction under the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Recognizing the threats to this marine mammal, the Government of India and the Ministry of Environment and Forests signed the CMS-UNEP MoU for the conservation and management of the dugong in April 2008.

Further, in October 2010, a 'Task Force for the Conservation of Dugongs' was constituted, with the agenda to look into the entire range of issues related to their conservation, and towards the implementation of the UNEP/CMS Dugong MoU in India.

This workshop is expected to take the dugong conservation agenda forward not only in India but also in other dugong range countries in South Asia.
