



## CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES

Press Release

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FIRST MEETING OF THE SIGNATORIES TO THE  
MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING FOR THE  
CONSERVATION OF CETACEANS AND THEIR  
HABITATS IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS REGION  
Apia, Samoa, March 2007

### **Pacific Islands and the United Nations working together to save endangered migratory animals**

*United Nations Environment Programme Convention on Migratory Species (UNEP/CMS) recognises key role of Pacific Island Countries for the protection of migratory animals and holds meeting to contribute to conservation actions for key species and habitats threatened with extinction in the region.*

*Apia, Samoa, 5 March:* Spread over 40 million square kilometres, accounting for 10% of the world's oceans, Pacific Island Countries not only share common cultural heritage and traditions, but also key migratory animals. Pacific islands are in fact custodians of turtles, whales, dugongs, dolphins and bird species travelling through Pacific waters and skies and connecting local communities.

"The story of Lady Vini, the tagged turtle released in Samoa that in the course of several months has passed through the EEZs of seven Pacific countries and territories, is truly heart-warming and highlights how these animals continue to link us together" stressed Hon. Faumuina Tiatia Liuga, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, opening the meeting.

Quoting the marine species programme framework, Asterio Takesy, the Director of the South Pacific Environment Programme (SPREP), co-organizer of the meeting, reminded delegates that "over half the world's known species of cetaceans are found in the region. The area also supports the largest remaining populations of dugongs, and green, hawksbill and loggerhead turtles."

Minister Liuga warned that these key species, important for the maintenance of health and balance of Pacific ecosystems and fundamental elements in local cultures and oceanic productivity, are threatened with extinction and require urgent intervention. "Rigorous conservation efforts are required from us all. Given their migratory nature, only a regional approach and cooperative efforts will work", said the Minister.

Success stories have been reported in the region, with sanctuaries for the protection of whales established in 9 countries, legislation and codes in place, whale and dolphin watching initiatives developed in Tonga, French Polynesia and Guam, as well as capacity building and outreach initiatives, including a reinforced partnership with CMS for the development of regional species agreements.

Despite these encouraging efforts, there is the need to increase capacity of Pacific Island Countries, attract more funds and develop effective regional conservation tools. The CMS, the UN convention protecting animals 'on the move', held this meeting to discuss how to further existing conservation actions to save these species from extinction and identify new avenues for cooperation.

"CMS knows that the Pacific Island Region is vital for the effective conservation of migratory animals and to address the threats they face", said Paola Deda, Inter-Agency Liaison Officer, speaking on behalf of the CMS Secretariat. "We hope to increase participation and membership in the region, in order to create effective conservation tools and concrete projects for migratory species. It is time for action, and CMS can offer practical solutions while attracting and stimulating political commitment at the global scale."

Minister Liuga, in his closing remarks, also recalled the importance of the Convention for the region, and urged countries who have not yet done so, to "sign without delay".

Notes and additional information:

CMS: The Convention on Migratory Species, an intergovernmental treaty developed under the umbrella of UNEP, addresses key challenges and barriers to the migration of species, such as climate change, illegal taking and pollution and other threats to the survival of migratory animals. For more information visit: [www.cms.int](http://www.cms.int)

CMS membership: CMS has currently 102 parties. Two Pacific Island Countries - Samoa and the Cook Islands - have acceded to the Convention during the last 18 months. Palau is the process of submitting its accession. Australia, New Zealand and several Pacific overseas territories are also covered by the Convention.

SPREP: The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) is an intergovernmental organisation that works with Pacific Island countries and territories to strengthen environmental management and promote sustainable development.

In November 2005 CMS and SPREP signed a partnership agreement in Nairobi. Since then a new cetaceans agreement for the Pacific, jointly negotiated with island states by SPREP and UNEP/CMS has come into force, and the current workshop - the first of its type - has been organised.

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