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Note from the Secretariat

The CMS Secretariat is circulating herewith, for the information of participants in the Eighth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, the report on Joint CMS/WDCS/WCS Project: Assessment of Cetacean Populations and Mortality in the Bay of Bengal submitted to the Secretariat by the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS). The report is being reproduced unedited in the form and the language in which it was received by the Secretariat.

Report on Joint CMS/WDCS/WCS Project: Assessment of Cetacean Populations and Mortality in the Bay of Bengal

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Project justification

Resolution 7.2 – *Implementation of Existing Agreements and Development of Future Agreement*

Project background

This jointly funded project has commenced cetacean surveys in the Bay of Bengal region, with the aim to eventually survey the coastal and offshore waters of Sri Lanka, India, the Maldives, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia, and the inland waters of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh where cetaceans occur. The goal is to work towards the development of an appropriate regional mechanism to address cetacean conservation issues under the auspices of CMS.

The project has, so far, achieved initial surveys in Bangladesh and Myanmar and conducted a training course for South Asian scientists in Myanmar. A workshop to assess the data collected to date is provisionally scheduled for March 2006. As this workshop will now be held outside of the agreed funding period, it will be fully funded by WDCS. A formal report of the survey results and training course completed to date will be submitted to CMS separately.

WDCS already has a long standing commitment to projects on Ganges River dolphin in southern and north-east India, Nepal and Bangladesh; humpback whales off Madagascar; Indus River dolphins in Sind, Pakistan; and Irrawaddy dolphins in the Sundarbans of Bangladesh and Myanmar.

WDCS is also committed to ensuring the timely establishment of a protected area for the Gangetic River dolphin in the Sangu River, Bangladesh; to ensure the creation of a formal conservation Action Plan for the Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary in Bihar, India; and to ensure the timely establishment of a protected area for the Irrawaddy dolphin in the Aywerwady River, Myanmar.

Although not formally part of this initial project proposal, we regard this work as directly contributing to this CMS Bay of Bengal project.

Project forward plan

WDCS remains committed to working with Range States to develop an appropriate regional conservation mechanism in the Bay of Bengal and Straits of Malacca, as indicated in Resolution 7.2 – *Implementation of Existing Agreements and Development of Future Agreements*.

As such, the organisation wishes to formally extend the project for at least the next triennium, utilizing WDCS funding, and to focus on the following objectives:

1. establishing baseline information on the current status of cetaceans in the region by completing surveys in Sri Lanka, India, the Maldives, Thailand and Indonesia;
2. document species distribution throughout the region and identify possible threatened species and populations, including the following predetermined projects;
3. identify threats to species across the region;
4. through a series of regional workshops, draw together stakeholders to review the cetacean survey programme, and to develop recommendations that:
 - a. identify critical research requirements and conservation measures needed to protect threatened species and populations;

- b. develop regionally appropriate techniques for monitoring populations and mortality and for mitigating identified threats;
 - c. create a technical support network for scientists and conservationists involved with cetacean conservation;
5. consult with Range States and regional officials to outline the workshop recommendations and proposed forward plan; and
6. develop a proposal for an appropriate regional mechanism to address cetacean conservation issues under the auspices of CMS.

WDCS intends to hold a briefing session for Range States and other interested Parties during the CMS CoP8. This session will overview the work to date and discuss possibilities for work in the coming triennium.