



## UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

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Программа Организации Объединенных Наций по окружающей среде      برنامج الأمم المتحدة للبيئة

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### **Pacific Action Plan for the Year of the Dugong**

#### **Uniting species conservation with sustainable development**

**Bonn/Palau, 14 March 2011** – A new pilot project using financial incentives to address direct hunting and the incidental capture of dugongs by changing people's practices and improving the livelihoods of local communities are among the initiatives to be promoted under the Pacific Year of the Dugong 2011.

The campaign, launched today in Palau by President Johnson Toribiong and Minister of Natural Resources, Environment & Tourism Harry Fritz, is a boost to the conservation of the mermaid-like sea cow and its seagrass habitats. Palau hosts the smallest, most remote and critically endangered dugong population in the region.

The initiative to protect the dugong, led by the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and its partner the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (UNEP/CMS), will target local coastal and fishing communities and water craft users in the Pacific region by showing that livelihoods and conservation are linked.

Dugongs, which play a significant ecological role in the functioning of coastal habitats, live in warm coastal and island waters from East Africa to Vanuatu in the Pacific. The action plan developed under the UNEP/CMS Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Dugongs and their Habitats throughout their Range (Dugong MoU) provides the framework for the regional cooperation for the long-term protection of dugongs in the Indian Ocean, South East Asia, South Asia, Australia and the Pacific Islands.

CMS Executive Secretary Elizabeth Maruma Mrema said: "Innovative measures under the CMS action plan will help protect dugongs and other marine species. Financial incentives will be promoted to make sure that conservation needs and sustainable development are reconciled at the community level."

Two pilot projects are currently being developed in Daru, Papua New Guinea, and Bazaruto Bay in Mozambique to reduce hunting and bycatch by providing some form of incentive to drive behavioural change – this might be in the form of loans, or payments for ecosystem services, for lessening their catches or for changes to more dugong-friendly fishing gear.

In some parts of the Pacific Islands, such as the Torres Strait between Papua New Guinea and Australia, hunting for direct consumption is the legal right of traditional inhabitants and sustainable hunting levels need to be agreed as part of the action plan.

The projects will consider the needs of both animals and of coastal communities and will increase dugong protection as well as improve socio-economic development.

Most of the world's remaining dugong populations outside of Australia and the United Arab Emirates are at serious risk of disappearing without effective and timely conservation action. The major causes of dugong mortality are poaching, unsustainable hunting, entanglement in fishing gear, vessel strikes and habitat degradation.

Gillnets are being used in almost 90% of the dugong's habitat, which threatens their survival. Reducing dugong mortality in fisheries remains the greatest challenge to the conservation of the world's only herbivorous marine mammal. Providing financial incentives to encourage the fishing community to replace harmful gillnets with alternative equipment such as line-fishing gear to reduce bycatch is one option being considered in the pilot projects.

In addition to biodiversity conservation and promoting sustainable fisheries practices, changing gear-types to reduce bycatch would also make a significant contribution to the Green Economy of small-scale and subsistence fisheries. Under conservation agreements with the communities, the ecological and economic value of seagrass habitats would be protected and livelihood incentives for coastal communities would be guaranteed, many of whom rely on these sustainable small-scale fisheries.

For the first time, the 18 signatories to the UNEP/CMS Dugong MoU have agreed to fund these pilot projects which will test economic incentives, including micro-loans and direct payments for biodiversity conservation.

Dugong conservation efforts will have other benefits as the protection of dugongs can have positive impacts across a wide range of habitats, in turn protecting other coastal marine species such as turtles, whales, dolphins and sharks.

At least five projects will be tested in sites across the Indian Ocean, South East Asia, South Asia, and Pacific Islands regions, and will be funded over a three-year period (2011-2013) through the UNEP/CMS MoU. Community organizations, NGOs, government officials and individuals will participate in developing and implementing the projects.

The Pacific-wide Year of the Dugong campaign invites individuals, conservation bodies, communities and governments to support this unique drive for dugong conservation. National campaigns will be conducted in Palau, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and the Solomon Islands.

The Pacific Year of the Dugong will initiate sustainable and long-term dugong protection by fostering community participation in environmental stewardship by improving their economic livelihoods.

## **Notes to editors**

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (UNEP/CMS) works for the conservation of a wide array of endangered migratory animals worldwide

through the negotiation and implementation of agreements and action plans. CMS is a fast-growing convention with special importance due to its expertise in the field of migratory species. At present, 115 countries are parties to the Convention.

[www.cms.int](http://www.cms.int)

The UNEP/CMS Office in Abu Dhabi aims to implement the CMS Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Dugongs (*Dugong dugon*) and their habitats. It was concluded in 2007 and has been signed by 18 countries: Australia, Bahrain, Comoros, Eritrea, France, India, Kenya, Madagascar, Myanmar, Philippines, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Seychelles, Vanuatu, United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania and Yemen.

SPREP is the Pacific region's major intergovernmental organisation charged with protecting and managing the environment and natural resources. SPREP's mandate is to promote cooperation in the Pacific islands region and to provide assistance in order to protect and improve the environment and to ensure sustainable development for present and future generations. It has 25 members.

[www.sprep.org](http://www.sprep.org)

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