

PRESS RELEASE

Nations Meet to Save Dugongs and their Seagrass Habitats

Abu Dhabi, 13 March 2017 – Delegates from twenty-three countries, along with the world's leading dugong and seagrass experts, gather today under the auspices of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) for the opening of the Third Meeting of Signatories (MOS3) to Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Dugongs and their Habitats (Dugong MOU).

The two-day meeting kicks off a week-long series of events in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, to focus global attention on the need to protect threatened dugongs, conserve their seagrass habitats and empower governments, researchers, local communities and the private sector to work together in partnership to save these iconic animals and the places where they live.

The CMS Dugong MOU is an international agreement signed by 26 Governments.

Opening the meeting, His Excellency Dr Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi, UAE Minister of Climate Change and Environment, said: "The CMS Dugong MOU is one of many multilateral environmental agreements the UAE has signed to promote international cooperation in the field of wildlife conservation. Our waters are home to more than 3,000 dugongs. As we recognized early on that any possible threat to seagrass beds poses a threat to dugongs, our country's dugong population is stable."

He added: "In line with the UAE Vision 2021, we established several marine protected areas. The UAE's efforts in the field of biodiversity conservation elevated the country's ranking in the Marine Reserves Sub-Index within the Environmental Performance Index (EPI) published by Yale University from 33rd place in 2012 to first place in 2014 and 2016."

Her Excellency Ms. Razan Khalifa Al Mubarak, EAD Secretary General said: "Without seagrass dugongs cannot survive – it is their main source of food. If we conserve seagrass meadows, the dugong's food source is protected. If we can also encourage fishing communities to adopt practices that don't destroy seagrass and accidentally catch dugongs, we will have helped secure the future of dugongs, seagrasses and those communities. In Abu Dhabi we have recognized this interdependent relationship and wish to share our learning and best practices. To support countries develop a strong scientific basis for achieving this goal we are very excited to be able to launch the Dugong and Seagrass Research Toolkit later in this meeting."

In his opening speech, Dr. Bradnee Chambers, CMS Executive Secretary, said: "This meeting, hosted by the Government of the United Arab Emirates, is bringing together an impressive range of Governments, experts, conservationists and business leaders with the aim of

identifying and agreeing on the best ways to conserve dugongs and seagrasses for future generations. As the largest international gathering of its kind, the meeting is also a prime example of the type of international ‘dugong diplomacy’ fostered by the long-standing partnership between CMS and the UAE.”

The Dugong MOU Secretariat has been based in Abu Dhabi since 2009 with generous support from Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi (EAD), on behalf of the Government of the UAE.

With a range extending over 40 countries from East Africa to Vanuatu in the Pacific, dugongs are central to many coastal communities’ cultural heritage. Their protection, together with the conservation of seagrass meadows upon which they feed, benefits marine biodiversity and contributes to human well-being. Seagrass meadows are one of the richest marine habitats on Earth harbouring as many as 600 species of marine life and providing nursery grounds for fisheries that people depend upon.

As with other migratory species that move across international boundaries, dugongs are shared by several countries. Their protection requires all countries where they reside to work together in a coordinated manner – a primary aim of the CMS Dugong MOU.

Developed in partnership between EAD, TOTAL, the CMS Dugong MOU Secretariat and the Dugong and Seagrass Conservation Project, the Toolkit has been developed by a team of technical experts and aims to help people assess and understand the interactions between dugongs, seagrasses and human communities. It is an easily accessible online decision-support tool that will help people to identify the most appropriate research tools and techniques for their circumstances. On 15-16 March, a Seagrass and Dugong Technical Workshop will demonstrate the Toolkit and give more than 100 invited participants the opportunity to work through examples under the guidance of the world’s leading dugong and seagrass experts.

Mr. Hatem Nuseibeh, President Total E&P UAE and Group Representative in the UAE said: “Total UAE and Total Abu Al Bukhoosh are proud to have supported the development of the Dugong and Seagrass Conservation Toolkit as partner to EAD’s Dugong Conservation Programme and in collaboration with the CMS Dugong MOU. We are very excited by the opportunity the Technical Workshop presents to demonstrate how the Toolkit can help countries and communities learn more about their dugongs and seagrasses.”

A public event on the evening of 14 March entitled *Global Dugong and Seagrass Conservation Efforts: From Grassroots to Governments* will be hosted by the Emirates Natural History Group, in partnership with the CMS Dugong MOU Secretariat, Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi, TOTAL and Dusit Thani Hotel Abu Dhabi.

Notes to Editors:

About the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)

CMS, administered by United Nations Environment (UNEP), is the only global biodiversity-related treaty specializing in the conservation and sustainable use of a wide array of terrestrial, aquatic and avian migratory species, their habitats and migration routes. Contracting Parties to CMS work

individually and cooperatively to ensure a favourable conservation status for migratory species across their range. At present, there are 124 Parties to the Convention, including the UAE. www.cms.int

About the CMS Dugong MOU

The CMS Dugong MOU, the Secretariat of which is located at the Convention on Migratory Species Office – Abu Dhabi, aims to promote internationally coordinated actions to ensure the long-term survival of dugongs and seagrass habitats throughout their range. Currently there are 26 Signatories to the Dugong MOU: Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Comoros, Egypt, Eritrea, France (Mayotte and New Caledonia), India, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Myanmar, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania, Vanuatu and Yemen. <http://www.cms.int/dugong/>

About the UAE Ministry of Climate Change and Environment:

The Ministry of Climate Change and Environment was established in February 2006 as the Ministry of Environment and Water. The ministry acquired its new name following the UAE Cabinet reshuffle in February 2016 and the subsequent integration of the climate change function. Under its redefined scope, the ministry has taken on a dual mandate. On the national level, the ministry aims to strengthen the UAE's efforts in preserving the environment and promoting food diversity in accordance with the nation's aspiration to emerge as a key benchmark for sustainable development. On the global level, the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment will join international stakeholders in combating climate change and profile the UAE's path-breaking achievements in the sector at thought leadership platforms worldwide. For further information please contact Media@moccae.gov.ae.

About Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi:

Established in 1996, the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi (EAD) is committed to protecting and enhancing air quality, groundwater as well as the biodiversity of our desert and marine ecosystem. By partnering with other government entities, the private sector, NGOs and global environmental agencies, we embrace international best practice, innovation and hard work to institute effective policy measures. We seek to raise environmental awareness, facilitate sustainable development and ensure environmental issues remain one of the top priorities of our national agenda. www.ead.ae

About the Dugong and Seagrass Conservation Project:

The Dugong and Seagrass Conservation Project seeks to conserve seagrass ecosystems through a combination of science and research, conservation policy development and implementation, community incentives, as well as outreach and education programmes. More than 26 partners and 38 projects across eight countries (Indonesia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mozambique, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, and Vanuatu) form the basis of this global conservation effort. The Project is executed by the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, with financing from the Global Environment Facility, implementation support by the United Nations Environment Programme and technical support from the Convention on Migratory Species' Dugong MOU Secretariat. www.dugongconservation.org

For more information please contact:

Ms. Jenny Renell
Associate Programme Management Officer

Convention on Migratory Species Office - Abu Dhabi
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
Mobile: +971 56 6424864
Email: jenny.renell@cms.int

Ms. Taif Muhammad Al Ameri
Director, Government Communication
UAE Ministry of Climate Change and Environment
Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Tel: +971 4 2148444
Email: TALAMIRI@moccae.gov.ae

Ms. Sobhia Akram El Masri
Senior Specialist - Media PR & Communications
EAD Press Office
Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi
Tel: +971 2 6934 637
Mobile: +971 50-4425096
Email: selmasri@ead.ae

Mr. Kirk Duthler
Communication Manager
The Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund
Mobile +971 50 780 7401
Email: kduthler@mbzfund.org

Ms. Maya Bankova-Todorova
Project Manager
The Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund
Mobile. +971 50 150 4421
Email: mbankova@mbzfund.org

