



PRESS RELEASE

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Pledges to Support the Conservation of Sea Cows and their Vital Seagrass Habitats

Abu Dhabi, 03 March 2013 – The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has confirmed its support towards the protection of dugongs and their vital seagrass habitats by becoming the 26th Signatory State to the UNEP/CMS Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Dugongs and their Habitats throughout their Range (Dugong MOU). The Dugong MOU operates under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS). The Dugong MOU is supported by a Secretariat, funded and hosted by the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi on behalf of the Government of the United Arab Emirates since 2009.

The Dugong MOU was signed by Mr. Mohammad Saud Sulayem, Advisor on International Cooperation at the Saudi Wildlife Authority (SWA), on behalf of His Highness Prince Bandar Bin Saud Bin Mohammad Al-Saud, President of SWA, at a Signing Ceremony held in the UNEP/CMS Office - Abu Dhabi and attended by all UNEP/CMS Office – Abu Dhabi staff as well as key people from the Environment Agency-Abu Dhabi (EAD) and Mr. Mubarak Salem, Director - Western Region, Ministry of Environment and Water.

Dugongs (*Dugong dugon*), commonly known as ‘sea cows’, belong to an order of marine mammals called Sirenia. These large but elusive animals are herbivores, feeding predominantly on seagrass, and play a significant ecological role in the functioning of coastal ecosystems. Dugongs are found in warm coastal waters of at least 40 countries in the Indo-Pacific, and the coastal waters of Saudi Arabia are host to significant dugong populations. On the Red Sea coast, important habitats exist around the Sharm Munaibira area of Al-Wajh, Qishran Island and Al Lith, and from Jizan to beyond the Yemeni border. Dugongs are also found on the eastern coastline of Saudi Arabia.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species lists dugongs as ‘Vulnerable’, meaning they face a high risk of extinction in the medium-term future. Dugongs are threatened by a range of harmful impacts, including drowning following incidental capture in fishing nets, loss or degradation of habitat through coastal development and strikes by vessels. As dugongs are slow to develop and reproduce infrequently, even small losses can have serious consequences to a population.

Due to the size of the dugong’s range, its transboundary movements and the trend of declining populations, a coordinated international effort is critical if conservation of this threatened marine mammal is to be effective.

The Secretariat looks forward to more countries in the North-West Indian Ocean sub-region following Saudi Arabia's lead by signing the Dugong MOU.

Notes to Editors:

The United Nations Environment Programme's Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (UNEP/CMS) works to conserve terrestrial, aquatic and avian migratory wildlife. The UNEP/CMS Dugong MOU aims to protect and conserve dugongs and their seagrass habitats. The UNEP/CMS Office – Abu Dhabi hosts the Dugong MOU Secretariat, which coordinates support for countries in their efforts to conserve dugongs and seagrasses: www.cms.int/species/dugong/index.htm

At present, 118 countries are Parties to CMS. For more information please visit: www.cms.int

The UNEP/CMS Office - Abu Dhabi oversees the implementation of two agreements – the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Dugongs and their Habitats throughout their Range, and the MOU on African-Eurasian Migratory Birds of Prey. The Dugong MOU came into force on 31 October, 2007 and has already been signed by 26 states.

26 Signatories to the Dugong MOU:

Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Comoros, Egypt, Eritrea, France (Mayotte and New Caledonia), India, Kenya, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Madagascar, Mozambique, Myanmar, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania, Vanuatu and Yemen

Conservation Action:

The dugong is listed on CITES Appendix I and CMS Appendix II.

For more information please contact:

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