



# CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES

UNEP/CMS/Concerted Action 12.3 (Rev.COP13)  
Original: English

## CONCERTED ACTION FOR THE ATLANTIC HUMPBACK DOLPHIN (*Sousa teuszii*)<sup>1</sup>

Adopted by the Conference of the Parties at its 13<sup>th</sup> Meeting (Gandhinagar, February 2020)

The Concerted Action for the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin was first adopted at the 12<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Conference of the Parties ([UNEP/CMS/COP12/Concerted Action 12.3](#)).

A report on implementation was submitted to the 13<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP13) ([UNEP/CMS/COP13/Doc.28.1.3](#)) together with a proposal for extension and revision ([UNEP/CMS/COP13/Doc.28.1.3/Add.2](#)), which was approved by the Parties.

### (i). Proponents:

Dr. G. Notarbartolo di Sciara, Appointed Councillor for Aquatic Mammals, in collaboration with the CMS Secretariat

Dr. Koen Van Waerebeek (species expert and member of the Aquatic Mammals Working Group), Conservation and Research of West African Aquatic Mammals (COREWAM), Accra, Ghana and Dakar, Senegal

Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC), UK

### (ii). Target species, lower taxon or population, or group of taxa with needs in common:

Class: Mammalia  
Order: Cetartiodactyla  
Infra-Order: Cetacea  
Family: Delphinidae  
Genus: *Sousa*  
Species: *Sousa teuszii*

Listed in CMS Appendix I and II

### (iii). Geographical range:

Coastal waters of the eastern tropical Atlantic Ocean, from Western Sahara southeast to Angola (Van Waerebeek et al., 2004, 2017; Culik, 2011; Collins, 2015).

Confirmed Range States: Mauritania, Senegal, the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea (Conakry), Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Gabon, the Republic of Congo, Angola.

Potential Range States: Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Equatorial Guinea.

<sup>1</sup> The geographical designations employed in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the CMS Secretariat (or the United Nations Environment Programme) concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The responsibility for the contents of the document rests exclusively with its author.

**(iv). Activities and expected outcomes:**

Activities:

1. Formation of a Steering Committee (SC) among stakeholders (governmental, NGO, Secretariat) of the Range States of the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin with a view to the organization of the proposed Meeting (see below). The SC would be tasked with the practical preparation of the meeting, including seeking funding, venue and date selection, definition of agenda, invitation of participants, as well as all other practical and logistical aspects.
2. Convene a Conservation Policy Meeting of Range States to define an Action Plan for renewed efforts to halt the decline of the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin.

A key proposal would recommend evaluating the creation, optimisation or otherwise strengthening the effectiveness of new or existing border-crossing Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). With the purpose to monitor and help steer progress and thus avoid stalling of momentum, the possible creation of an ad hoc Task Force (TF) of Range State stakeholders, supported by expert advice, would be recommended.

The timing, venue, duration of the meeting, as well as other parameters would be decided in consultation with the Range States and the CMS Secretariat, as coordinated by the Steering Committee. Before, three highly successful intergovernmental meetings treating African cetaceans were celebrated, respectively in Conakry (2000), Adeje-Tenerife (2007) and Lomé (2008); and the proposed meeting will build on these.

3. Discussion and formulation of a feasible Plan of Action (PoA) for the five-year period 2021-2025, including undertake a status evaluation of Atlantic Humpback Dolphin in each of the Range States.
4. Examples of potential agenda items:
  - (1) Introduction;
  - (2) Overview of the distribution and natural history of the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin;
  - (3) Overview of the known conservation challenges;
  - (4) Discussion of feasible conservation measures, especially ways to reduce mortality in fisheries;
  - (5) Discussion of the feasibility to introduce new border-straddling MPAs, and improve efficiency of existing ones;
  - (6) Formulation of a new Action Plan;
  - (7) Formation of an ad hoc Task Force to help ensure progress is made.

Expected outcomes:

*Immediate (after Meeting):*

- Wide agreement on a renewed Plan of Action to mitigate the several pressing conservation problems of the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin.
- An active regional ad hoc Task Force. It is composed of a small group of Range State focal points and regional marine biologists, advised where needed by international experts and/or NGOs, to mutually support, co-ordinate and implement conservation and management activities.

*Mid-term:*

- If considered relevant by the Range States focal points: Improved conservation through enhanced attention to border-straddling Marine Protected Areas.
- Formation of new border-straddling (binational) Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are recommended, similar to existing ones, such as for instance the Saloum-Niumi complex, which

ecologically unites Senegal's Saloum Delta National Park with the Gambia's Niimi National Park. These are predicted to result in measurable conservation effects by limiting boat traffic and fishing effort, avoiding net entanglements and mitigating habitat destruction. Some MPAs, such as the Tristao UNEP/CMS/COP13/Doc.28.1.3/Add.2 3 Islands in Guinea, require an access permit for non-residents, providing a level of protection from disturbance. As small MPA networks (White et al., 2005), bi-national involvement has obvious benefits, allowing for a larger total protected area with increased ecological effectiveness, the potential for coordinated planning where social and environmental dimensions may become intertwined. Specific bi-national proposals of MPAs could emerge from this meeting.

- The necessary engagement by national, regional and intergovernmental partners, as well as local communities, will require wide consultation within a multidisciplinary forum.

*Long-term:*

- Demonstrably improved conservation status of the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin throughout its distribution range.
- Increased research and bycatch monitoring efforts.

**(v). Associated benefits:**

While the proposed meeting will focus on the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin, conservation and management issues of other coastal cetaceans (and optionally also manatees) could also be visited opportunistically, perhaps in a separate session.

- Any actions that would strengthen the sound management of coastal marine habitat and thus the conservation status of Atlantic Humpback Dolphin would also benefit other vulnerable coastal aquatic mammals species, including the West African Manatee (*Trichechus senegalensis*), coastal populations of Common Bottlenose Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*), and the Clymene Dolphin (*Stenella clymene*), (cf. Van Waerebeek and Perrin, 2007b) amongst others.
- Awareness raising will be one of the primary goals of the meeting.

**(vi). Timeframe:**

The Range State Meeting would be recommended to occur in early 2021. The Steering Committee would be charged to define all specifics in consultation with the Range States and the CMS Secretariat before the end of 2020. A proposed five-year AP would be suggested to cover the period 2021-2025, however funding for its implementation would be sought independently from the Meeting.

**(vii). Relationship to other CMS actions:**

The earlier listing of the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin on Appendix I and II demonstrates the wide consensus and awareness among Parties and Range State stakeholders that this species' precarious conservation status deserves the highest concern.

By listing the species on Appendix I, CMS Parties have already assessed the species as being in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of their range. In addition, it notes that, Parties that are a Range State to a migratory species listed in Appendix I shall endeavour to strictly protect them by: prohibiting the taking of such species, with very restricted scope for exceptions; conserving and where appropriate restoring their habitats; preventing, removing or mitigating obstacles to their migration and controlling other factors that might endanger them.

By listing the species on Appendix II, CMS Parties have already agreed that the species would benefit from an international agreement. As such, the species is included under the Western African Aquatic Mammals MOU concluded under CMS in 2008, and covered by the attached Small Cetacean Action Plan. However, since the signing of the MOU no range state meetings have taken place. This concerted action would allow more short-term action involving the Range States of this particular species.

The Atlantic Humpback Dolphin was designated for Concerted Action in 2008, however, no concrete activities were undertaken in the framework of CMS. This proposal seeks to outline the urgent next steps to be taken to address the immediate conservation needs of the species.

CMS COP has adopted Resolutions and Decisions addressing the key threats to the species, such as bycatch, aquatic wild meat, marine debris and underwater noise. Implementation of this concerted action would at the same time serve to implement these Resolutions.

**(viii). Conservation priority:**

Bycatch in small-scale fisheries with some suspected deliberate captures, mostly related to increasing consumption of aquatic/marine bushmeat, as well as fast coastal development, are considered the principal threats to the long-term survival of the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin (Collins, 2015; Van Waerebeek et al., 2017). The conservation status of this dolphin species appears to have noticeably deteriorated since the evaluations by the CMS/UNEP projects WAF CET-1 & 2 evaluations in the early 2000s. The 'Vulnerable' IUCN Red List classification is widely considered obsolete (Van Waerebeek, 2003; Van Waerebeek et al., 2003, 2004; Weir et al., 2011; Ayissi et al., 2014). Collins (2015) recommendation of a 'Critically Endangered' listing may not quite apply to the species as a whole, but most probably to some of the ten different stocks (e.g. the Dakhla Bay population). Since 2010, *Sousa teuszii* has been listed on CMS Appendices I and II (Van Waerebeek & Perrin, 2007a).

The widespread trade in and consumption of bushmeat in western Africa embodies a complex and almost intractable conservation problem (e.g. Bowen-Jones & Pendry, 1999; Brashares et al., 2004; Ntiamoa-Baidu, 1997). The cultural and socio-economic drivers for the utilisation of cetaceans, manatees and sea turtles for human consumption bear many similarities to the terrestrial sourced bushmeat, which led to the introduction of the aquatic/marine bushmeat concept (Alfaro & Van Waerebeek, 2001; Clapham & Van Waerebeek, 2007) and subsequent wide acceptance (AMWG-CMS, 2016).

In western Africa, cetacean bushmeat has been documented in an increasing number of countries, e.g. Mauritania, Senegal, the Gambia (Murphy et al., 1997; Van Waerebeek et al., 2000, 2003, 2004; Leeney et al., 2015), Guinea (Bamy et al., 2010, 2015; Van Waerebeek et al., 2017), Ghana (Van Waerebeek & Ofori-Danson, 1999; Ofori-Danson et al., 2003; Debrah et al., 2010; Van Waerebeek et al., 2009, 2014), Togo (Segniagbeto et al., 2010, 2014), Benin (Sohou et al., 2013), Nigeria (Uwagbae & Van Waerebeek, 2010; Van Waerebeek et al., 2017), Cameroon (Ayissi et al., 2011; 2014), Gabon and the Republic of the Congo (Van Waerebeek & De Smet, 1996; Collins, 2012, 2015; Collins et al., 2004, 2010).

An additional challenge is the demand for dolphin parts for use as bait in longline fisheries targeting, primarily, various species of shark destined for the shark fin trade. Often, dolphin meat commands comparable price levels as Billfishes, Albacore or Yellowfin Tuna (Ofori-Danson et al., 2003). All Atlantic humpback dolphin specimens reported by Van Waerebeek et al. (2017), both freshly dead carcasses and skeletal (cranial) material, were encountered in a context of artisanal fisheries, confirming the latter as the main threat as reported before (Waerebeek et al., 2004; Van Waerebeek & Perrin, 2007a; Weir & Pierce, 2013; Weir et al., 2011; Ayissi et al., 2014). Entanglement (by-catch) in both gill-nets and beach seines were confirmed, while it could not be determined whether some may have been taken intentionally.

Countries with known landings of Atlantic humpback dolphin include Mauritania, Senegal, the Gambia, Guinea, Togo, Nigeria, Cameroon, Gabon and the Republic of the Congo. Interview data should be critically interpreted as few fishermen will self-incriminate, for hunting of cetaceans is illegal in West African countries. In Ghana, it has been suggested that captures may have contributed to the species' local extirpation (Van Waerebeek et al., 2004, 2009). In a few places, such as along parts of the Togo and Benin coastline, dolphins enjoy protection against hunting thanks to veneration of aquatic mammals among the Ewe people (Segniagbeto et al., 2014), which may help explain why low numbers are still present. However, the scale of small-cetacean landings as prevalent in, for instance, Ghana, warns against complacency. Many 100s of dolphins per annum of 14 different

species are landed in several ports on a near-daily basis and are traded for their meat (e.g. OforiDanson et al., 2003; Debrah et al., 2010; Van Waerebeek et al., 2009, 2014). No management programme is active and catch statistics are collected only occasionally, in an academic context.

In some areas, the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin possibly was depleted by significant incidental mortality from fisheries interactions before port monitoring effort even started. Some hope remains, for instance, that rare reports of unidentified dolphins nearshore the Volta River Delta in Ghana would prove to be a remnant community (Van Waerebeek et al., 2004). Nigeria, Togo, Benin and the Republic of the Congo have been confirmed as Range States only in the past few years, but they had been expected. While gratifying, by itself not necessarily a reassuring conservation message. Suggestions of a range without distribution gaps (e.g. Zwart and Weir, 2014), while unsupported, seems overly optimistic and may delay already difficult conservation efforts that attempt to rally public awareness concerning a threatened marine mammal. Occasional or rare sightings of small groups in most of its range point to residual, struggling, populations. Anticipated are de novo distribution gaps arising following decades of fisheries interactions and coastal encroachment reducing the species' historical range. Irreversibly developed coastlines, particularly near the larger cities and ports, may already constitute such gaps.

**(ix). Relevance:**

While the species' habitat is a narrow nearshore strip, distances covered parallel to the coastline are more extensive and *S. teuszii* has long been confirmed a "migratory species" in the CMS sense when it was witnessed transgressing maritime borders (Van Waerebeek et al., 2004; Van Waerebeek and Perrin, 2007a). Recently documented specimens in Nigeria, Togo, Cameroon, Guinea and Congo (Collins, 2015; Van Waerebeek et al., 2017) underscore the frequent captures in small-scale fisheries, in parallel with a region-wide generalisation of demand for bushmeat, including the aquatic form, likely related to diminished fish landings (Brashares et al., 2004). Significant mortality relative to their low abundance, prey competition from inshore fisheries, habitat loss and related disturbance from accelerating coastal development, jointly pose the most formidable challenges to the long-term survival of the Atlantic humpback dolphin. The implementation of practical conservation measures becomes increasingly urgent with concerted actions needed regionally and locally to stop the Atlantic humpback dolphin from sliding towards extinction. Whether this species has a future will, inevitably, be decided in Africa (Van Waerebeek et al., 2017).

**(x). Absence of better remedies:**

So far, region-wide dedicated activities and meetings towards an improved conservation status of the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin have been implemented internationally mainly under the CMS umbrella. Moreover, all Range States of the target species are CMS Parties. Hence it would seem most logical that this renewed effort would also be CMS-mediated. Given that the action will focus on the conservation of habitats as well as the conservation of the species, this would also benefit broader suite of aquatic flora and fauna – giving it a further comparative advantage.

**(xi). Readiness and feasibility:**

Three meetings related to western African aquatic mammals were successfully implemented in the subregion, convened by CMS:

- i) Workshop on the Conservation and Management of African Cetaceans "Atelier sur la Conservation et la Gestion des Cétacés de l'Afrique", Conakry, Guinea, 2000 (co-convened by the Government of Guinea).
- ii) WATCH I Meeting (Western African Talks on Cetaceans and their Habitats), Adeje, Tenerife, October 2007.
- iii) 2<sup>nd</sup> Inter-Governmental Meeting on Western African and Macaronesian Aquatic Mammals (WATCH II - Western African Talks on Cetaceans and their Habitats), Lomé, Togo, October 2008: 15 countries signed an MOU with CMS to protect over 30 small cetacean species.

A new regional meeting on western African cetaceans is long overdue. The main risk factor that could delay implementation is insufficient funding. However, a preliminary offer of potential venue has already been suggested by Dr. Idrissa L. Bamy, Director General of the Centre National des Sciences Halieutiques de Boussoura (CNSHB), Ministère des Pêches, de l'Aquaculture et de l'Economie Maritime, Conakry, Guinea.

**(xii). Likelihood of success:**

Representatives of several range states (e.g. Guinea, the Gambia) have already, at various stages, indicated their desire to help convene a new Meeting of Range States to discuss the conservation status of the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin. There seems to be broad consensus throughout the region that a long-awaited dedicated Meeting would substantially contribute to an improvement in the efforts towards better conservation measures of the target species.

The main potential obstacle is considered to be lack of funding.

**(xiii). Magnitude of likely impact:**

The Atlantic humpback dolphin has long been identified as a prime “flagship species” for the coastal environment of western Africa (Van Waerebeek, 2003; Van Waerebeek et al., 2003, 2004; Weir et al. 2011; Collins et al., 2015). The successful implementation of this proposal will provide a powerful inspiration and useful practical template as to also promote increased efforts towards the improved conservation and management of other aquatic mammals in African waters.

**(xiv). Cost-effectiveness:**

The Meeting would be held in a western African country, assuring reasonable venue and travel costs. A budget will be prepared by the Steering Committee. Meetings in which most, or all, of the Range States actively participate have the highest probability to be considered authoritative and to generate a clear international, region-wide, mandate, and whence be cost-effective.

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