

ANNEX 3. SUMMARY WORKING GROUP – OUTCOME FROM SESSION #1

Wednesday 24 August 2005
09:00 – 11:30 (Morning Tea 10:30)

Three Working Groups were formed to consider a number of key questions that emerged from the Meeting yesterday (23 August 2005). The first three questions were:

Question 1 – Priorities for Action

Six key areas and potential activities were identified under which regional actions could be undertaken (see page 4). The areas were:

- Reduced mortality
- Protect Habitat
- Education, awareness and participation
- Promote implementation
- Research and monitoring
- International cooperation

Considering these areas and the points raised under each of them yesterday identify two or three areas of priority and why they are a priority.

Question 2 – ‘Conservation Plan’

Considering the detailed list of possible actions that were identified yesterday review the items and identify any additional actions that could be considered. Discuss whether that list of actions provide the basis for a ‘Conservation Plan’ promoting cooperation conservation at a regional scale.

Question 3 – Framework

Having identified a range of regional cooperation actions considers what framework would promote delivery? Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using the modified text of the IOSEA MOU (Non-paper) as a starting point.

In considering the questions each Group appointed a rapporteur who reported back to the Plenary on the considerations of the Group. A summary of the three presentations is provided below.

SUMMARY

The six key areas of potential activity were identified under which regional actions were considered and potential activities under each point were prioritised. Resulting from this process were some common elements that could be considered within a Conservation Management Plan under a Dugong MOU.

- Reduced mortality

The delegates concluded that it was necessary to have an understanding of mortality factors impacting on dugongs within a jurisdiction. In particular incidental capture in fishing nets, direct harvest and potential negative impacts from tourism were deemed to be the highest priority for action. However, in recognition of some of these key mortality factors, there was also a recognition that providing alternative livelihoods for local communities, including maintaining cultural protocols (eg. status) was

important as was the need for any subsistence harvest to be sustainable for that population of dugongs.

- **Protect Habitat**

Identification of key dugong habitats within jurisdictions and subsequent protection or conservation measures (e.g. prevention of destructive fishing practices), with community participation in such areas was seen to be very important. This would assist with reducing direct and indirect impacts from fisheries and vessel traffic in key dugong habitats. Where key dugong habitats were not known within jurisdictions, rapid assessment of potential areas was a critical starting point. Developing networks of protected habitats within and between jurisdictions would allow protection across a broader region and would make such protection more biologically relevant than if treated as stand-alone initiatives. Identifying key dugong habitats would also allow for a more sensitive approach to coastal development and enable pollution abatement measures to be developed and implemented more efficiently.

- **Education, awareness and participation**

There was very strong support amongst delegates for having information about dugong biology, ecology, research and communication materials (e.g. pictures) available and disseminated to countries, amongst scientists and local communities. There was recognition of the need to communicate dugong status and need for conservation among stakeholders. Part of this process would include having prominent local celebrities deliver messages to target audiences. After viewing the IOSEA turtle website, there was strong support for having a web-based system available to exchange data and information.

- **Promote implementation**

In addition to the discussion below under Question 3, other issues that should be addressed during implementation included property rights, ethnic rights and medical uses of dugong. Research should address training and capacity building issues and the exchange of model legislation/management frameworks to provide guidance to countries in implementing various aspects of a regional arrangement. The issue of resources to implement a regional agreement was highlighted, especially from the point of view of wide economic disparities among countries that may be signatories to such an arrangement.

- **Research and monitoring**

The development of standard protocols/guidelines for conducting research and monitoring on dugongs and their habitats was endorsed. As part of the development and implementation of standard protocols and guidelines, there was strong endorsement to raise the capacity of local community and in-country expertise to undertake research and monitoring on dugongs and their habitats. There was a strong desire and need to encourage community initiatives, especially where top-down approaches would not be effective. Investigating fisheries-related mortality and mitigations measures was deemed to be a high priority given this was identified as a key mortality factors (see above). Linked to the idea of a web-based system for dissemination of information, it was thought that it would be useful to have a list of researchers and technical experts and their contact details, as well as mechanisms for dissemination and discussion of research results and their implications for management responses.

- International cooperation

The delegates endorsed the need for, and benefits of, international cooperation to conserve dugongs and their habitats.

Question 3 – Framework

Delegates, having identified a range of actions that would benefit from regional cooperation, considered what framework would promote delivery. Advantages and disadvantages of using the modified text of the IOSEA MOU (non-paper) as a starting point were discussed and endorsed as a way forward for discussion.

There was strong agreement that a non-legally binding arrangement in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding was the preferred framework for regional cooperation. A stand-alone Action Plan under CMS was considered to be too loose an arrangement to effect conservation actions at a regional level. It was felt that a legally binding Agreement was not the appropriate mechanism at this time.

QUESTION: DO WE NEED TO PURSUE A REGIONAL ARRANGEMENT OR NOT?

Possible themes/arguments for a cooperative agreement:

Reduce Mortality

- minimize pressure by providing alternative livelihoods
- reduce fishing-related mortality
- cooperative/short-term responses to deal with emergency situations
- techniques for rescuing stranded animals
- examine cross-species benefits/unintended consequences of management actions
- control push nets

Protect Habitat

- MPAs (eg dugong-protected areas, focussing on seagrass habitat) at regionally-relevant scales (as opposed to isolated protected areas)
- rapid assessment of habitat, taking advantage of shared expertise/approaches
- community-based approaches are key
- sensitive approaches to coastal development, taking account of dugong presence
- pollution abatement measures

Research and Monitoring

- Investigation of fisheries-related interactions/mortality; possible mitigation measures
- Migration studies (satellite telemetry, where feasible/appropriate)
- Capacity-building for monitoring/census work; regional institutions to provide incentives to work on dugong
- Standard protocols/guidelines for research (eg for sampling/collection of data, sightings), especially between two or more neighbouring countries
- Community involvement in research; sharing of results of studies
- update/maintain international registry of dugong researchers
- exploring opportunities for joint research with other species groups
- genetic sampling for management purposes
- Cooperative research at regional scale

Education / Awareness / Public participation

- shared experiences
- combined awareness/education programmes (eg AUS, PNG)
- rapid (eg cost-effective, web-based) exchange of scientific data, including gray literature, within/among national jurisdictions
- exchange of basic information materials (eg for informing fishers)
- incentives for community involvement/protection of habitat, support for meetings to exchange information/innovative ideas
- dissemination/recognition of importance of traditional knowledge, value of dugong to indigenous communities
- instill public awareness of the rarity of having dugong in coastal waters

Promote Implementation

- develop/exchange national action plans (eg model plans)
- recognition of activities on local scale
- training/capacity building
- provision of resources
- review of national and international legislation relevant to dugong conservation
- exchange of model legislation/management frameworks
- Commonality in national legislation (harmonisation)

International Cooperation

- periodic (regular) meetings/workshops