Proposal for Inclusion of species on the Appendices of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

A. Proposal: Inclusion of Orcaella brevirostris in Appendix II.

B. Proponent:

C. Supporting Statement

1. Taxon

1.1. Classis	Mammalia
1.2. Ordo	CETACEA
1.3. Familia	Delphinidae
1.4. Genus/Species/Subspecies	Orcaella brevirostris (Gray, 1866)

1.5. Common name(s)

English:	Irrawaddy dolphin
Spanish:	delfin del rio Irrawaddy
French:	dauphin de l'Irrawaddy
Hindi:	basiya moggur
Indonesia:	pesut mahakam
Kampuchea:	phsaut
Vietnam:	ca nuoc

2. Biological data

2.1. Distribution (current and historical)

The Irrawaddy dolphin is found in tropical and sub-tropical coastal waters and some major river systems of the Indo-West Pacific region from the Bay of Bengal to the east Australian coast, between about 25°N and 25°S (Marsh et al., 1989). The species is reported from the Irrawaddy River in Burma, Chilka Lake and the Ganges and Brahmaputra in India, the Mekong (as far as Kampuchea) and the Mahakam in Borneo (Leatherwood and Reeves, 1983).

2.2. Population (estimates and trends)

A survey undertaken in the late 1970s reported between 100 and 150 dolphins in Semayang Lake and the Pela River and adjacent Mahakam River in eastern Borneo (Tas'an and Leatherwood, 1984); no recent estimates exist for the area. Formerly noted as extremely abundant, the population in Chilka Lake, India, is said presently to be between 20-30 animals (Perrin, 1988). In northern Australia, in particular in western Gulf of Carpentaria, a population of about 1,000 Irrawaddy dolphins was reported from aerial surveys (Freeland and Bayliss, 1989).

2.3. Habitat (short description and trends)

This species seems to prefer coastal areas, particularly the muddy, brackish waters at river mouths; it does not appear to venture far offshore, since all sightings have been made only within a few kilometers from the coastline (Morzer-Bruyns, 1966; Leatherwood and Reeves, 1983, Marsh et al., 1989). Some populations are said to be restricted to fresh water. In the Mekong River these dolphins are often observed near sand banks where streams flow into lakes (Lloze, 1973, quoted by Klinowska, in press; Marsh et al., 1989).

Irrawaddy dolphins appear to be generalist feeders; they eat mainly fish, although squids and small crustaceans are also reported (Marsh et al., 1989).

2.4. Migrations (kinds of movement, distance, proportion of the population migrating)

In Semayang Lake, eastern Borneo, Irrawaddy dolphins perform daily migrations from the lake to the Mahakam River, returning to the lake in the evening (Tas'an and Leatherwood, 1984). These dolphins may be found at distances up to 1,300 km upstream in major rivers, an indication that the species may undertake movements of considerable extent.

3. Threat data

3.1. Direct threat to the population (factors, intensity)

In some parts of Kampuchea and India, Irrawaddy dolphins are taken for food, but in most of the range they are protected by local beliefs. Incidental mortality occurs in fishing nets in Bangladesh, India and the Gulf of Papua, as well as in anti-shark nets in Australia (Mitchell, 1975, Leatherwood and Reeves, 1983; Perrin, 1988; Marsh et al., 1989). Because of their presence in coastal and riverine areas, incidental catches in fishing nets are likely to occur elsewhere in the range.

3.2. Habitat destruction (quality of changes, quantity of loss)

Irrawaddy dolphins from Semayang Lake were formerly observed in the Mahakam River up to Tengagarong and Samararinda. At present, and probably due to the intense activity related to the timber industry, these dolphins are no longer observed near these towns but only above Muarakamen (Tas'an and Leatherwood, 1984).
A population inhabiting Chilka Lake in India is said to be declining because of reduction in food supply and silting of the lake from agricultural development (Perrin, 1988).
Since Irrawaddy dolphins are found in rivers, they should be affected by pollution and other habitat encroachment associated with the development of their tropical habitat.

3.3. Indirect threat (e.g. reduction of breeding success by pesticide contamination)

There is no specific information on pollutant levels in this species. Reduction of fish populations in Indonesian rivers by illegal fishing methods (Mackinnon and Sutanto, 1982) may affect food supply for these dolphins.

3.4. Threats connected especially with migrations.

Construction of dams may prevent movements of Irrawaddy dolphins up rivers. Restriction of movements of this species are already observed in some areas (Tas'an and Leatherwood, 1984).

3.5. National and international utilization

Irrawaddy dolphins taken in some parts of Kampuchea and India are used for food. In the case of dolphins drowned in gillnets, the oil may be use for medicinal purposes (Mitchell, 1975; Perrin, 1988; Marsh et al., 1989).
Some Irrawaddy dolphins have been maintained in captivity in Australia and Indonesia (Tas'an and Leatherwood, 1984; Klinowska, in press).

4. Protection status and needs

4.1. National protection status

The Irrawaddy dolphin has been recently included in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act. General provisions protect the species in Australia. No information is available from other countries, but legislation for protection of habitat may be applicable (Atkins, 1989; Perrin, 1989; Klinowska, in press).

4.2. International protection status

Orcaella brevirostris is listed under Appendix II of CITES. The habitat of this species may be protected by the Ramsar and World Heritage Conventions. The species is listed as "Insufficiently Known" by the IUCN (Perrin, 1989).

4.3. Additional protection needs

Priorities for conservation are studies of natural history and the effects of human activities on the populations, especially in riverine habitats. Conservation programs should be launched in each range state, and those sharing river systems should cooperate in reducing the effects of regional development on populations of this species.

5. Range States

India, Bangladesh, Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Kampuchea, Vietnam, Australia, Papua New Guinea and East Timor. Both China and Philippines may also be Range States.

6. Comments from Range States

7. Additional remarks

8. References

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