



**CONVENTION ON  
MIGRATORY  
SPECIES**

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Agenda Item 25.1.4

**AQUATIC WILD MEAT**

*(Prepared by the Secretariat and the ScC Working Group on Aquatic Wild Meat)*

Summary:

This document reports on progress to implement Decisions 14.186 – 14.189 *Aquatic Wild Meat* and Decisions 14.190–14.193 *Action Plan to Address Aquatic Wild Meat Harvests in West Africa*, and proposes draft Decisions for adoption.

The attached draft Decisions would support the achievement of Targets 1.3, 3.1, 4.1–4.2 and 5.4–5.5 of the Samarkand Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2024–2032.

This document was revised by the Scientific Council at its 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Sessional Committee in December 2025.

## AQUATIC WILD MEAT

### Background

1. The wider issue of illegal and unsustainable intentional take is discussed in [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.28.1](#) *Illegal and Unsustainable Taking of Migratory Species*, which also contains draft Decisions on related issues.
2. This document contains the following sections, each reporting back on relevant COP14 Decisions:
  - A. Aquatic Wild Meat
  - B. Action Plan to Address Aquatic Wild Meat Harvests in West Africa
- A. Aquatic Wild Meat
3. COP12 (2017) adopted [Resolution 12.15](#) *Aquatic Wild Meat*, which, among other measures, established the Working Group on Aquatic Wild Meat (AWMWG). COP14 then adopted the following Decisions on this issue:

#### **Decision 14.186 Directed to the Parties**

*Parties are requested to:*

- a) *provide technical and capacity-building support to Range States of the Action Plan to Address Aquatic Wild Meat Harvests in West Africa for the implementation of activities outlined in the Action Plan, as well as support as required to the activities of the Aquatic Wild Meat Working Group; and*
- b) *consider the development of action plans to reduce aquatic wild meat hunting and consumption in East, South-East, and South Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific Islands Region.*

#### **Decision 14.187 Directed to the Scientific Council, through its Aquatic Wild Meat Working Group**

*The Scientific Council, through its Aquatic Wild Meat Working Group, is requested to:*

- a) *develop criteria for considering if some Appendix II-listed sharks and rays should be included within the scope of the Working Group;*
- b) *collect and present information about seabird harvests as aquatic wild meat in collaboration with the Task Forces on illegal take established by Resolution 11.16 (Rev.COP14);*
- c) *collaborate with the relevant IUCN Specialist Groups to present a case to the Scientific Council for the assessment of the migratory nature of crocodylians (Genera: Gavialis, Crocodylus, Mecistops, Caiman, Melanosuchus) and freshwater chelonians, and the relevance of CMS to their conservation and management, including whether or not they may fit the criteria for inclusion in the Appendices;*
- d) *support, as capacity allows:*
  - i. *studies of the human dimensions of aquatic wild meat use, which are critical for designing effective conservation and management programmes that favour sustainable over unsustainable uses, including:*
    - *contemporary and historical socio-cultural aspects of harvesting and consuming aquatic wild meat, including the role of taboo systems, to provide insights or management measures that can be respectful of the cultural practices of Indigenous Peoples, and local communities;*
    - *the drivers of the harvest and consumption of aquatic wild meat;*

- *the nutritional roles aquatic wild meat provides, the strengths and weaknesses of alternatives, and the health risks from both;*
- *food security and safety of aquatic wild meat use;*
- ii. *increased quantitative assessments of consumption and trade in aquatic wild meat to better understand demand and trade pathways;*
- iii. *increased efforts to assess the efficacy of existing legislation with regard to specific aquatic wild meat uses, and the degree to which enforcement capacity alone can address unsustainable aquatic wild meat harvests;*
- iv. *implementation of environmental education programmes to raise awareness of the importance and benefits of migratory megafauna, and laws concerning them;*
- v. *analysis of the extent of discard cases and their impact on the availability of aquatic wild meat;*
- e) *encourage the establishment of networks of appropriate experts to foster collaborative efforts to develop regional action plans for reducing unsustainable aquatic wild meat harvests; and*
- f) *ensure dissemination of information on its work on aquatic wild meat and the resulting recommendations by:*
  - i. *sharing information with the International Whaling Commission and participating in future Small Cetacean Subcommittee meetings with a focus on aquatic wild meat;*
  - ii. *continuing to provide advice to the CMS Secretariat to input to the Collaborative Partnership on Sustainable Wildlife Management;*
  - iii. *extending collaboration to include COMFAUNA, CIMFAUNA, the Sustainable Wildlife Management (SWM) Programme, and the WILDMEAT Project;*
  - iv. *supporting efforts for coordination between CMS and CITES for improved regulation and sustainable management of trade in aquatic wild meat species;*
  - v. *publishing consolidated papers in their individual expert capacity about aquatic wild meat harvests, and drawing these to the attention of the Scientific Council.*

**Decision 14.188 Directed to the Scientific Council**

*The Scientific Council is requested to:*

- a) *consider the recommendations of the Aquatic Wild Meat Working Group submitted to the 7th meeting of the Sessional Committee and address any matters requiring broader Scientific Council attention; and*
- b) *consider the recommendations of the Aquatic Wild Meat Working Group submitted to the 8th meeting of the Sessional Committee, and provide advice to the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.*

**Decision 14.189 Directed to the Secretariat**

*The Secretariat shall:*

- a) *consult with the Aquatic Wild Meat Working Group of the Scientific Council regarding information that should be shared with other international forums, such as the Collaborative Partnership on Sustainable Wildlife Management and CITES; and*
- b) *support the work of the Aquatic Wild Meat Working Group.*

### Activities of the Aquatic Wild Meat Working Group

4. The Working Group currently has 30 members with expertise in different taxonomic groups or regions. It is chaired by Maximin Djondo (Benin Environment and Education Society) and operates under the responsibility of the COP-appointed Councillor for Bycatch, Barry Baker.
5. The Working Group reviewed several reports, specifically the report on *Quantification of the contemporary whaling and aquatic wild meat takes of all CMS Appendix I-listed cetaceans in all regions* (see UNEP/CMS/COP15/Inf.25.4.1a and UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.25.4.1 *Conservation Priorities for Cetaceans*), and the report on the *Global Review of Direct Take of Seabirds* (see below). It also reviewed the draft format for National Reports for the Action Plan to Address Aquatic Wild Meat Harvests in West Africa, subsequently circulated in CMS Notification 2025/002 (see below for further details). The Working Group was also invited to contribute to the CMS input to [CBD Notification 2025-014 Submission of views and information on global guidance for sustainable wildlife management](#).
6. The Working Group was unable to provide, as planned, input on a draft analysis of the implementation reports on the Action Plan to Address Aquatic Wild Meat Harvests in West Africa because no reports were received from Parties following the Notification.
7. Due to the short intersessional period, the assessment of the migratory nature of crocodylians (Genera: Gavialis, Crocodylus, Mecistops, Caiman, Melanosuchus) and freshwater chelonians, and of the relevance of CMS to their conservation and management, including whether or not they may fit the criteria for inclusion in the Appendices, has not yet been completed. Therefore, it has been included in the draft Decisions contained in Annex 3 of this document.

### Global Review of Direct Take of Seabirds

8. With funding provided by the Government of Germany, the Secretariat contracted BirdLife International to support the AWMWG with the development of the report on seabird harvests as aquatic wild meat (as requested by Decision 14.187 (b)). The Chair of the Working Group as well as the COP-appointed Councillor for Bycatch, who supports the aquatic wild meat work stream, were involved at all stages of the project, from developing the terms of reference and the exact methodology, to commenting on interim and final draft versions of the report. The full Aquatic Wild Meat Working Group was also given the opportunity to comment on the final draft before it was submitted to the Secretariat.
9. The full report is available as UNEP/CMS/COP15/Inf.25.1.4. The Executive Summary and recommendations are available as Annex 1 to this document.
10. Draft Decisions, which were developed based on the recommendations of the AWMWG and derived from the Global Review of Direct Take of Seabirds, are contained in Annex 3 of this document.

### Activities of the Secretariat

11. In line with Decision 14.189, the Secretariat supported the AWMWG throughout the intersessional period, making use of a dedicated space on Teams. A first step was the confirmation of new leadership after the previous Chair had stepped down.

12. The AWMWG was established through Resolution 12.15 without specific terms of reference. Following discussions during the 7<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Sessional Committee of the Scientific Council, the Secretariat is now proposing the adoption of simple terms of reference that follow the practice of the Working Group to date, as contained in Annex 2.
13. Due to their continuous nature, it is recommended that the actions requested in Decisions 14.187 (d-f) be included in the TOR for the AWMWG (Annex 2).

B. Action Plan to Address Aquatic Wild Meat Harvests in West Africa

14. COP14 adopted [Resolution 14.15 Action Plan to Address Aquatic Wild Meat Harvests in West Africa](#), with the Action Plan annexed to it. It also adopted the following Decisions on this issue:

**Decision 14.190 Directed to the Parties**

*Parties that are Range States to the Action Plan to Address Aquatic Wild Meat Harvests in West Africa are requested to:*

- a) *as a matter of priority, address actions marked for immediate implementation, and those for delivery by 2025 and 2026;*
- b) *set up the structures required, for example through the formation of national working groups, to ensure active collaboration between stakeholders within each range country to maximize the effective use of resources and expertise; and*
- c) *provide a brief report on the implementation of the Action Plan in time for the last meeting of the Sessional Committee before the 15<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP15) using a template provided by the Secretariat.*

**Decision 14.191 Directed to the Scientific Council, through its Aquatic Wild Meat Working Group**

*The Scientific Council, through its Aquatic Wild Meat Working Group, is requested to:*

- a) *support the Secretariat in the development of a simple reporting template designed to gather basic information on the implementation of the Action Plan;*
- b) *review information provided by Parties on the implementation of the Action Plan and prepare a brief summary and analysis; and*
- c) *make recommendations on the further implementation of the Action Plan at the last meeting of the Sessional Committee of the Scientific Council prior to COP15.*

**Decision 14.192 Directed to the Scientific Council**

*The Scientific Council is requested to:*

- a) *consider the information provided by Parties on the implementation of the Action Plan, as well as the summary and analysis and the resulting recommendations of the Aquatic Wild Meat Working Group; and*
- b) *provide guidance on the further implementation of the Action Plan to COP15.*

**Decision 14.193 Directed to the Secretariat**

*The Secretariat shall develop a simple reporting form in collaboration with the Scientific Council, through its Aquatic Wild Meat Working Group, enabling assessment of progress in the implementation of the Action Plan, and disseminate this to Parties that are Range States to the Action Plan to enable reporting sufficiently in advance of the last meeting of the Sessional Committee of the Scientific Council prior to COP15.*

### Implementation of the Action Plan to Address Aquatic Wild Meat Harvests in West Africa

15. Following consultations with the AWMWG on the reporting template, the Secretariat sent out [Notification 2025/002 Call for Reports on the Implementation of the Action Plan to Address Aquatic Wild Meat Harvests in West Africa](#) on 13 January 2025, requesting Range State Parties to use the template to report on the implementation of the Action Plan.
16. Unfortunately, despite personal reminders to Focal Points, no Party responses were received, so the review and recommendations as foreseen in Decision 14.191 (b) and (c) could not be undertaken.
17. A final call for reports was sent to Focal Points of Range States in October. Four reports were received from Burkina Faso, Ghana, Nigeria, and Togo. A summary of the responses can be found in [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Inf.25.1.4b](#).
18. The lack of submission of National Reports on the Action Plan to Address Aquatic Wild Meat Harvests in West Africa points to potential challenges regarding implementation and reporting capacity. Annex 3 of this document contains draft Decisions, which propose that the AWMWG investigates how to improve the support for Parties for implementation and reporting.

### Discussion and analysis

19. Aquatic wild meat remains a significant threat affecting many of the marine and freshwater species listed on CMS Appendices. The unsustainable and often illegal harvesting of aquatic animals for food, cultural practices or trade continues to drive population declines in numerous migratory species, undermining conservation efforts, disrupting ecosystem balance and threatening the livelihoods of communities that depend on healthy aquatic environments.
20. Despite its severity, the issue has received limited attention outside the CMS framework, resulting in a lack of coordinated global response. This gap underscores the critical role of CMS in leading efforts to address aquatic wild meat harvesting through science-based policy, capacity-building and international cooperation. Continued action under the CMS framework is essential, including through alignment with the Global Initiative on Illegal and Unsustainable Taking. Strengthening collaboration among CMS Parties, enhancing monitoring and enforcement, and community engagement are key steps.

### Recommended actions

21. The Conference of the Parties is recommended to:
  - a) note the summary and recommendations of the report *Global Review of Direct Take of Seabirds* contained in Annex 1 of this document;
  - b) adopt the Terms of Reference for the Working Group on Aquatic Wild Meat contained in Annex 2 of this document;
  - c) adopt the draft Decisions contained in Annex 3 of this document; and
  - d) delete Decisions 14.186–14.193.

## ANNEX 1

**GLOBAL REVIEW OF DIRECT TAKE OF SEABIRDS:  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

*(The full report can be found in [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Inf.25.1.4](#))*

**Executive summary**

Seabirds are the most threatened group of birds, facing pressures both at sea and on land. The most recent global review of threats to seabirds (Dias et al. 2019) found “hunting and trapping”, including egg and chick collection, to be the fourth biggest threat after invasive species, fisheries and climate impacts, affecting 27% of all seabird species. Despite the prevalence of this pressure on seabird populations, intentional take of seabirds receives comparatively less attention and has not been comprehensively reviewed.

This report presents a global review of the direct, intentional take of migratory seabirds for human consumption and use, with data drawn from over 2,800 scientific records, covering all 318 migratory seabird species. Results reflect evidence from a literature review of the English scientific literature from 2010 onwards, combined with information from the IUCN Red List assessments that comprise the most recent global assessment of threats to seabirds, published as Dias et al. (2019).

Records of seabird take were identified for 105 migratory seabird species (33% of those assessed), 20 of which are globally threatened (CR, EN, VU), and 33 of which are listed on the CMS Appendices, with a further 15 noted as likely meeting the criteria for listing (UNEP/CMS/Res14.20). Records of seabird take were found across 56 countries, with the USA, Canada, Greenland, New Caledonia and Norway recording the highest numbers. Seabird take occurs in both CMS Party and non-Party States, indicating that this is a widespread issue that could benefit from internationally coordinated action. Records of seabird take were most common for adult seabirds and eggs during the breeding season. The majority of records were of legal take or of take with an undefined legal status, and were predominantly conducted by Indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) for subsistence use. Illegal take, when documented, tended to be associated with poachers and fishers.

Only a minority of records included data on the number of birds taken or the presence of management or enforcement mechanisms. Few studies assessed population trends linked to take, but where documented, seabird populations showed signs of decline or extirpation due to take, among other pressures impacting species. Human health risks were not the focus of many of the papers reviewed, but where these were reported, studies commonly looked at risks to IPLCs from consuming contaminated seabirds, particularly in relation to heavy metals and zoonotic diseases.

Overall, this review highlights key data gaps in the understanding of seabird take that are important to address to inform evidence-based conservation strategies. We highlight examples of where take is being managed, and monitoring is reported to inform future strategies. This report highlights the need for internationally coordinated conservation action among CMS Parties and relevant Range States, in conjunction with the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) and the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP), to safeguard seabird populations and the communities that rely upon them.

## **Key policy recommendations**

1. Review action plans for Appendix I-listed species to ensure the issue of take is adequately addressed, including monitoring, enforcement and compliance.
2. Consider further species for listing in the Appendices of the Convention.
3. Enhance cooperation and coordination between AEWA, ACAP and CMS.
4. Consider engagement with non-Party Range States.
5. Consider setting scientific priorities at the national level to improve the evidence base on seabird take.
6. Consider mechanisms for co-management of seabird harvest with IPLCs, particularly for communities where health risks from seabird consumption may be present.
7. Strengthen Wildlife Health Management.
8. Consider research to better understand the drivers of illegal seabird take.

## ANNEX 2

**TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE WORKING GROUP ON  
AQUATIC WILD MEAT****Background**

CMS COP12 (2017) first adopted [Resolution 12.15 Aquatic Wild Meat](#), which established the thematic Working Group on Aquatic Wild Meat to provide expert advice to CMS Parties, to collaborate with relevant organizations such as the International Whaling Commission (IWC), and to coordinate science and policy participation with the relevant Memoranda of Understanding and Agreements concluded under CMS. COP14 (2024) adopted [Resolution 14.15 Action Plan to Address Aquatic Wild Meat Harvests in West Africa](#), the implementation of which is also supported by the Aquatic Wild Meat Working Group.

**Purpose**

- A. The primary objective of the Working Group is to support the delivery of relevant tasks contained in the Programme of Work of the Sessional Committee.
- B. In addition, the Working Group will support the implementation of relevant Resolutions and Decisions directed to the Scientific Council.
- C. The Working Group will support the implementation of take-related goals and targets within the Samarkand Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2024–2032, as well as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the further development of its monitoring framework.
- D. The Working Group will provide a platform to discuss and exchange information and scientific findings on aquatic wild meat-related matters. Mandates will be given through Decisions at each COP.
- E. The Working Group will also support Parties that are Range States to the Action Plan to Address Aquatic Wild Meat Harvests in West Africa with implementation and reporting.
- F. The Working Group will make efforts to coordinate with the Working Group on Illegal and Unsustainable Taking of Wildlife, and provide input to their work, as appropriate and necessary.
- G. The Working Group will also, as capacity allows:
  - a. support studies of the human dimensions of aquatic wild meat use, which are critical for designing effective conservation and management programmes that favour sustainable over unsustainable uses, including:
    - i. contemporary and historical socio-cultural aspects of harvesting and consuming aquatic wild meat, including the role of taboo systems, to provide insights or management measures that can be respectful of the cultural practices of Indigenous Peoples and local communities;
    - ii. the drivers of the harvest and consumption of aquatic wild meat;
    - iii. the nutritional roles aquatic wild meat provides, the strengths and weaknesses of alternatives, and the health risks from both;

- iv. food security and safety of aquatic wild meat use;
- v. increased quantitative assessments of consumption and trade in aquatic wild meat to better understand demand and trade pathways;
- vi. increased efforts to assess the efficacy of existing legislation with regard to specific aquatic wild meat uses, and the degree to which enforcement capacity alone can address unsustainable aquatic wild meat harvests;
- vii. implementation of environmental education programmes to raise awareness of the importance and benefits of migratory megafauna and laws concerning them;
- viii. analysis of the extent of discard cases and their impact on the availability of aquatic wild meat;
- b. review, compile and, if necessary, help refine methods to evaluate the impact of trade in aquatic wild meat on wildlife populations;
- c. encourage the establishment of networks of appropriate experts to foster collaborative efforts to develop regional action plans for reducing unsustainable aquatic wild meat harvests;
- d. seek to improve consideration of community-led conservation, traditional knowledge complementing modern approaches, and strengthening the leadership of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in its work, including through collaboration with IPBES and IUCN; and
- e. ensure dissemination of information on its work on aquatic wild meat and the resulting recommendations by:
  - i. sharing information with the IWC and participating in future Small Cetacean Subcommittee meetings with a focus on aquatic wild meat;
  - ii. continuing to provide advice to the CMS Secretariat to input to the Collaborative Partnership on Sustainable Wildlife Management;
  - iii. extending collaboration to include COMFAUNA, CIMFAUNA, the Sustainable Wildlife Management (SWM) Programme, and the WILDMEAT Project;
  - iv. supporting efforts for coordination between CMS and CITES for improved regulation and sustainable management of trade in aquatic wild meat species;
  - v. drawing relevant scientific publications about aquatic wild meat harvests to the attention of the Scientific Council.

## **Membership**

- A. Membership of the Working Group is open to members of the Scientific Council and external experts, including from observer organizations.
- B. The Working Group strives to maintain a balance of gender, regional representation and areas of expertise.
- C. The involvement of Working Group members is entirely on a voluntarily basis.
- D. If and when needed, experts external to the Working Group and interested in contributing to its objectives may occasionally be invited to join meetings or to support specific tasks.

## **Organization of Work**

- A. The Working Group will elect a Chair from among its members and will operate by seeking consensus among the Group. If not a member of the Scientific Council, the Chair will be supported by the COP-appointed Councillor for Bycatch to ensure close alignment with the Scientific Council's work and procedures. If the Chair has to leave her/his position, a new Chair will be appointed from among its members.
- B. The Working Group will predominantly operate electronically by communicating via a dedicated workspace in MS Teams, and email if needed. Meetings (in-person or virtual) will be held as required, depending on funding.
- C. The Chair of the Working Group will report on progress to the Sessional Committee.
- D. The CMS Secretariat will support and facilitate the coordination of the activities and the organization of meetings of the Working Group.

## **Duration**

The Working Group will remain in place until the Sessional Committee decides that its work is complete or an alternative arrangement is made.

DRAFT DECISIONS

**AQUATIC WILD MEAT**

***Directed to Parties***

15.AA Parties are requested to:

- a) provide technical and capacity-building support to Range States of the *Action Plan to Address Aquatic Wild Meat Harvests in West Africa* for the implementation of activities outlined in the Action Plan, as well as the support required for the activities of the Aquatic Wild Meat Working Group;
- b) consider the development of regional action plans to reduce aquatic wild meat hunting and consumption in East, South-East and South Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific Islands Region;
- c) improve the scientific knowledge of seabird take and the understanding of its drivers; and
- d) implement mechanisms for co-management of seabird harvest with Indigenous Peoples and local communities, particularly for communities where health risks from seabird consumption may be present.

***Directed to the Scientific Council***

15.BB The Scientific Council, with support from the Aquatic Wild Meat Working Group and Secretariat, is requested to collaborate with the relevant IUCN Specialist Groups to assess the migratory nature of crocodylians (Genera: *Gavialis*, *Crocodylus*, *Mecistops*, *Caiman*, *Melanosuchus*) and freshwater chelonians, and the potential relevance of CMS to their conservation and management, including whether or not they may fit the criteria for inclusion in the Appendices.

***Directed to the Secretariat***

15.CC The Secretariat shall

- a) consult with the Aquatic Wild Meat Working Group of the Scientific Council regarding information that should be shared with other international forums, such as the Collaborative Partnership on Sustainable Wildlife Management, CITES, IWC, AEWA and ACAP; and
- b) bring the outcomes of the review of the potential suitability for listing on the CMS Appendices of crocodylians and freshwater chelonians to the attention of the Scientific Council.

## **ACTION PLAN TO ADDRESS AQUATIC WILD MEAT HARVESTS IN WEST-AFRICA**

### ***Directed to Parties***

- 15.DD Parties that are Range States to the Action Plan to Address Aquatic Wild Meat Harvests in West Africa are requested to:
- a) review which actions are nationally relevant and urgently address priorities for implementation;
  - b) set up the structures required, for example through the formation of national working groups, to ensure active collaboration between stakeholders within each Range State to maximize the effective use of resources and expertise; and
  - c) provide a brief report on the implementation of the Action Plan in time for the last meeting of the Sessional Committee of the Scientific Council before the 16<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP16) using a template provided by the Secretariat.

### ***Directed to the Scientific Council***

- 15.EE The Scientific Council, where applicable with support from the Aquatic Wild Meat Working Group, is requested to:
- a) investigate how to improve support to Parties regarding implementation and reporting;
  - b) review information provided by Parties on the implementation of the Action Plan, prepare a brief summary and analysis, and make recommendations on the further implementation of the Action Plan.

### ***Directed to the Secretariat***

- 15.FF The Secretariat shall disseminate a simple reporting form to Parties that are Range States to the Action Plan to enable reporting sufficiently in advance of the last meeting of the Sessional Committee of the Scientific Council prior to COP16.