

PROPOSAL FOR INCLUSION OF SPECIES ON THE APPENDICES OF THE CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF MIGRATORY SPECIES OF WILD ANIMALS

A. PROPOSAL: Listing of the manatee (*Trichechus manatus*) populations between Honduras and Panama in **Appendixes I and II** of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS).

B. PROPONENT: The Government of the Republic of Panama.

C. SUPPORTING STATEMENT

1. Taxonomic Group

- 1.1 Class: Mammalia
- 1.2 Order: Sirenia
- 1.3 Family: Trichechidae
- 1.4 Genus: *Trichechus manatus*
- 1.5 Common Name: Manatee, water cow (manatí, vaca de agua)

2. Biological data

2.1 Distribution (present and historical)

The manatee population is found in the Atlantic Coast, between Honduras and Panama. Its presence has been documented since long ago. There is also long standing documentation on the manatee population between Costa Rica and Panama, since 1981 (O'Donnell). Sue Mou compiled reports in 1990 on the Sixaola river, which serves as a natural frontier between both countries. The inhabitants of the shores of the Sixaola river assert that the manatees were common in the Panamanian lagoons of San San. This has been ascertained by Sue Mou et al. (1990). The present population is to be found in the North-eastern part of Panama, near the border with Costa Rica. The distribution of the species covers an area extending from the South-eastern part of Costa Rica, in the Wild Life Refuge of Gandoca-Manzanillo, in the Province of Limón, to Bocas del Toro in Panama. Jiménez (1998) concludes that the population nucleus of the manatees is to be found in the wetlands of Boca del Toro.

It should also be pointed out that there are other populations in the Atlantic Coast, in Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Honduras.

2.2 Population (estimates and trends)

We have scanty information on the population in Panama. The population estimate for the frontier zone of Costa Rica and Panama stands at approximately forty individuals.

The estimated size of the manatee population in North-eastern Costa Rica is of fifty individuals with a minimum figure above twenty-five (Jiménez 1998a). The species distribution in the south east of the country is limited to the area between Manzanillo and the Sixaola river, with some sightings in the Carbón river to the south of Cahuita National Park. The size of this population is not likely to exceed eight individuals. They

are in contact with the Panamanian population of Boca del Toro.

In Nicaragua recent evidence points to the presence of this species in the South-eastern section of the country (Jiménez 1998, unpublished data).

2.3 Habitat

Manatees live in rivers, estuaries, and coastal zones, although they are mostly found in places where they have access to fresh water (Lefebvre et al 1989). These animals spend several days feeding in a specific area, and then swim to other places many miles away (Hartman 1979, Montgomery et al 1981). Manatees need a depth of water of between one and four metres, although they may use deeper channels. They are long lived mammals and have low reproduction rates. Some individuals live up to 80 years. The female gives birth to one or two young ones after a 12 month gestation (Odeell et al. 1995, Rathbun et al. 1995). The litter is pink coloured, about a metre long and weigh between forty and sixty pounds. The mother is very loving and carries the baby at the breast, under a fin, for some time. The young ones stay with their mother until they have reached middle growth.

Manatees behave as generalist herbivores, feeding on submerged, emerging and floating plants (Ceratophyllum, Eichornia, Echinochloa, Hydrilla, Panicum, Paspallum, Phargmites, Pistia, Pontederia, Potamogeton, etc.), mangrove shoots and leaves, and leaves of shore trees (NRCA/UNEP 1994). They may consume daily up to 8% of their weight in water vegetation (Best 1981).

Manatees are not really a hunted animal, but they suffer intense persecution on account of their flesh and fat, both of excellent quality. The few individuals of the species remaining in Panama are condemned to extinction, despite being protected by a Law-Decree. Only the awakening of a conservation conscience may save the species from its total disappearance from the country.

3. Threat data

3.1 Direct threats

Hunting and capture with trammels. The hunting of manatees has decreased drastically in the last decades though perhaps there is some residual hunting - enough to threaten the population (Jiménez 1998, a, b). In the last few years the use of trammels in the lagoons has become the principal threat for the species, and this has harmed the population in the Central American Isthmus.

3.2 Habitat destruction

The manatee's habitat is threatened by deforestation, sedimentation, alteration of the river basins, river pollution, and navigation with motor boats.

3.3 Indirect threats

Toxic compounds have been detected in the water courses inhabited by the species (i.e. Terbufos and Ethoprop) coming from agricultural plantations. The impact of these pesticides on the population remains to be evaluated and his evaluation should be carried out. Collisions with motor boats do not seem to be a main cause of mortality, but engines may alter the use of the water courses.

3.4 Threats connected especially with migrations

The increase of water traffic in the Sixaola river may affect migration towards feeding

banks near Costa Rica. Another threat is posed by the growth of agricultural activities at the border region between both countries, and by the draining of wetlands for cultivation.

3.5 National and international utilisation

The manatees constitute a tourist attraction, as they awake sympathy. They may be considered sociable mammals and are sometimes seen peacefully resting during daytime, in neat groupings made out of mother, father and two offspring, several families together.

4. Protection status and needs

4.1 National protection status

The species is protected by laws or regulations in Costa Rica, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama.

In Panama the species is listed as being at risk of extinction, as well as for existing within a protected zone (San San Pond Sak Wetlands).

4.2 International protection status

Considered a vulnerable species in the IUCN Red Data Book (1994) Listed in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade on Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

4.3 Additional protection needs

Protection of the shared or border areas between Costa Rica and Panama that constitute a habitat for the species. Protection also for the manatee populations of North-eastern Costa Rica and South-eastern Nicaragua.

5. Range States

The range states are: the Bahamas, Belize, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, French Guiana, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Puerto Rico, Surinam, Trinidad and Tobago, United States of America and Venezuela.

6. Comments by the Range States

Despite the fact that the proposal refers to the species populations from Honduras down to Panama we shall be having consultations, inasmuch as possible, with the competent authorities of the other range states, in order to facilitate the adoption of the proposal by the Scientific Council as well as the Conference of the Parties.