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

A. Proposal: Inclusion of Platanista gangetica in Appendix II.

B. Proponent:

C. Supporting Statement

1. Taxon

1.1.	Classis	Mammalia
1.2.	Ordo	CETACEA
1.3.	Familia	Platanistidae
1.4.	Genus/Species/Subspecies	Platanista gangetica (Roxburgh, 1801)

1.5. Common name(s)

English:	Ganges River dolphin
Spanish:	delfin del Rio Ganges
French:	platanista du Ganges
Hindi:	susu, soosa
Assamese:	hiho
Sindi:	sunsar
Bengali:	susuk

2. Biological data

2.1. Distribution (current and historical)

The Ganges river dolphin is found in the Ganges, Brahmaputra, Meghna and Karnaphuli rivers and their tributaries. The distribution is said to be restricted only by the lack of water and by rocky barriers (Mohan, 1989). The species has been reported in most of the tributaries of the Ganges River. It is found in the Gandak River and its tributaries the Kali and the Narayani, which extend into Nepal. In the Brahmaputra River the dolphin has been reported as far northeast as the Dihing, Buri Dihing and Lohit Rivers in eastern Assam and as far north as the Tista River and its tributaries, which extend into Sikkim and Buthan (Mohan, 1989; Reeves and Brownell, 1989; Shrestha, 1989).
According to Shrestha (1989) Ganges river dolphins have been observed in the four main rivers systems in Nepal. In the Meghna River and its tributaries, these dolphins are found as far up the river as Sunamganj in Bangladesh. A large population of Ganges river dolphins have been reported to inhabit the lower reaches of the Karnaphuli river (Mohan, 1989).

2.2. Population (estimates and trends)

Formerly quite abundant, the overall population of Ganges river dolphins is now reduced to about 4,000-5,000 individuals in

India (Mohan, 1989). This, however is a rough estimate not based in systematic surveys (W.F. Perrin, pers. comm.). In Nepal, the population is rapidly declining and is estimated at less than 100 individuals (Shrestha, 1989).

2.3. Habitat (short description and trends)

Exclusively riverine. In the river basins in India, the Ganges river dolphin is present mostly in plains where the rivers run slowly. This seems to be opposite to the habitat observed in Nepal, where the dolphin can be found in relatively clear waters and rapids. In both areas, however, there is a preference for deep waters (Jones, 1982; Perrin and Brownell, 1989; Shrestha, 1989).

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

Seasonal movements are not well known. Observations in Nepal suggest that these dolphins move in and out of tributaries of the Gandaki, Koshi, and Karnali systems during high water seasons, probably spending lower-water seasons in deep pools of the tributaries. In the main rivers, a decrease in abundance during the summer would confirm a seasonal pattern of migration (Shrestha, 1989).

3. Threat data

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

Along the Brahmaputra River, about 30 to 40 Ganges river dolphins are taken annually with nets, harpoons and spears by tribal hunters. In the Bhagalpur area, between 130 and 160 dolphins are netted every year, and in Bangladesh 50-150 are harpooned annually by tribal hunters. Direct catches in the Ganges are also reported, but no numbers are indicated (Mohan, 1989). In Nepal, fishermen catch an unknown number of dolphins by harpooning or deliberately entangling them in gillnets (Shrestha, 1989).
During the dry season, large deep pools are formed and the fishery is concentrated in these areas. Dolphins become entangled in fishing nets (in particular drag nets) and drown. Fishermen try to avoid entanglements because the dolphins may damage their nets (Haque, 1982; Mohan, 1989). By-catches may occur in Nepal through the use of set and drift gillnets, snares, snag hooks, dynamite and a variety of poisons in fishing operations (Shrestha, 1989).

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

Construction of dams for hydroelectric development and irrigation in the Ganges system has divided dolphin populations

into small isolated subpopulations, preventing migrations and reducing the food availability. The population above the Kaptai dam in the Karnaphuli River disappeared over a period of 6 or 7 years after the completion of the dam (Mohan, 1989). The diversion of water for irrigation caused high fluctuations in the water flow, reducing suitable habitats for the dolphins (Perrin and Brownell, 1989; Mohan, 1989). Similar effects are expected with dolphin populations in the Karnali River in Nepal, in addition to erosion of banks and changes in river beds, as a result of deforestation and mining (Shrestha, 1989). Heavy river traffic is drastically increasing in both India and Nepal, and this may result in habitat restriction and changes in feeding behaviour (Perrin and Brownell, 1989; Mohan, 1989; Shrestha, 1989).
Pollution by fertilizers, pesticides, and industrial and domestic effluents is dramatic in the Ganges River: about 1.15 million metric tons of chemical fertilizers and about 2600 tons of pesticides are dumped annually to the river system (Gupta, 1984, quoted by Mohan, 1989). Industrial effluents are also a source of increasing pollution in Nepal (Shrestha, 1989).

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

Although no studies have been undertaken the effects of pollutants in Ganges river dolphins should be consider deleterious (Perrin and Brownell, 1989).
Food supply may be reduced by isolation of fish resources between dams (Mohan, 1989).

3.4. Threats connected especially with migrations

Extensive construction of dams may isolate populations, prevent their migration to the adjacent river systems and ultimately result in their total eradication. The situation is more critical in the river systems of Nepal, where the number of dolphins seems to be rapidly declining (Shrestha, 1989) and possibly no more than 100 remain.

3.5. National and international utilization

Throughout their range, the meat of Ganges river dolphins is used for human consumption and the oil is used in lamps, in medicine and as attractant in fishing activities (Mohan, 1989; Shrestha, 1989).

4. Protection status and needs

4.1. National protection status

The Ganges river dolphin is protected by law in India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. There is no information available

about legislation in Buthan. In India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, hunting is prohibited but exceptional takes can be authorized by license (Atkins, 1989). In Nepal the species is listed as endangered, and hunting is completely banned. Law enforcement, however, is difficult because most poaching occurs during the night (Atkins, 1989; Perrin and Brownell, 1989).

4.2. International protection status

Platanista gangetica is listed in Appendix I of CITES, and categorized as "Vulnerable" by the IUCN (Perrin, 1989). It may be protected under the World Heritage Convention of Paris, of which Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan are parties, but no agreements have been reached to date (Atkins, 1989).

4.3. Additional protection needs

There is an urgent need of monitoring the global status of the habitat of this species, with emphasis on the effects of damming of main rivers and the increasing pollution. Estimations of abundance and levels of mortality should be carry out, as well as studies on biology of the species. In addition, enforcement of existing laws is an important in the protection of the Ganges river dolphin.

5. Range States

India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal.

6. Comments from Range States

7. Additional remarks

8. References

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