



MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING ON THE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF DUGONGS AND THEIR HABITATS (DUGONG MOU)

Dugong (*Dugong dugon*) © Kristina Vackova

SUMMARY

- Effective since 31 October 2007
- Covers 46 Range States across Africa, Asia and Oceania
- Activities guided by a Conservation and Management Plan (CMP)
- CMP implementation is supported through the Dugong, Seagrass and Coastal Communities Initiative

Mission

To ensure a favourable conservation status for dugongs and their seagrass habitats throughout their range

Conservation and Management Plan Objectives

- Reduce direct and indirect causes of dugong mortality
- Improve understanding of dugongs through research and monitoring
- Protect, conserve and manage habitats for dugongs
- Improve understanding of dugongs through research and monitoring of their habitats
- Raise awareness of dugong conservation
- Enhance national, regional and international cooperation
- Promote implementation of the MOU
- Improve legal protection of dugongs and their habitats
- Enhance national, regional and international cooperation on capacity building

The Dugong MOU aims to promote internationally coordinated actions to ensure the long-term survival of dugongs and seagrass habitats throughout their extensive range. The Dugong MOU Secretariat is based in CMS Office - Abu Dhabi. The office is hosted by Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi, on behalf of the Government of the United Arab Emirates.

Signatory States to the MOU implement activities which are guided by a Conservation and Management Plan (CMP) annexed to the MOU. Achieving the objectives of the CMP is underpinned by the Dugong, Seagrass and Coastal Communities Initiative. The Dugong Technical Group provides expert advice to Signatories to promote the implementation of the CMP.

Signatories adapt the implementation of the CMP to the needs of the dugong populations and seagrass habitats in their coastal waters, and have the opportunity to shape the policy direction of the MOU as well.

Conservation and Management of Dugongs

The dugong (*Dugong dugon*), or sea cow, is the only herbivorous marine mammal. Across its range, which extends across over 40 countries throughout tropical and subtropical coastal waters from East Africa to Vanuatu in the Pacific, dugongs help maintain seagrass habitats also important for other species such as marine turtles, and play an important role in the culture of many coastal communities. The dugong is the only member of the Family Dugongidae.

Dugongs can grow up to three metres in length, weigh up to 500 kilograms, live for up to 70 years and travel hundreds of kilometres in only a few days. The dugong's primary food is seagrass, with one dugong capable of eating as much as 40 kilograms of seagrass a day. Seagrasses are also an important store of atmospheric carbon (known as blue carbon) and they provide nursery grounds for many fish species.

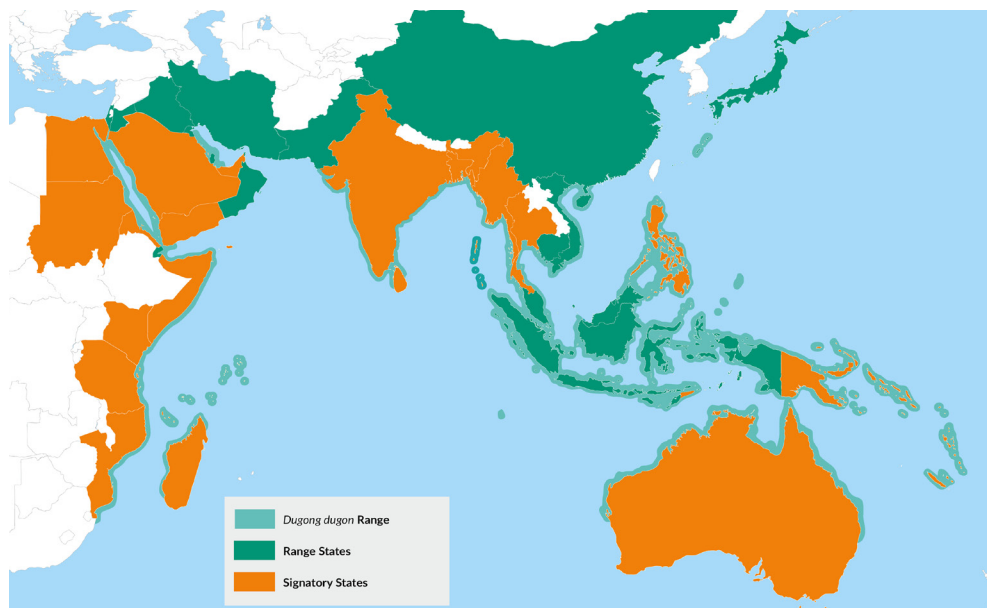
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Vulnerable to Extinction

The dugong is classified as ‘Vulnerable’ on the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species, indicating that there is a high risk of extinction in the wild in the medium-term. CMS lists the dugong on Appendix II, meaning that the conservation of this species needs international cooperative activities across its migratory range.

The dugong’s life cycle and its reliance on seagrass for food make it highly vulnerable to threats: they grow slowly, mature late and have slow reproductive cycles. Seagrasses are restricted to

shallow, coastal waters where the seabed receives enough light for photosynthesis to occur. These areas are also subject to high levels of human activities, which can have short- and long-term impacts on seagrass ecosystems. The conservation of dugongs and their critical seagrass habitats provides an opportunity to significantly contribute to the conservation of marine biodiversity.



Map of Dugong MOU Signatories and Range States (as of September 2019)

Threats to dugongs

- Bycatch
- Direct catch
- Vessel strike
- Destruction of seagrass habitats

Threats to seagrasses

- Damaging fishing methods
- Development of coastal areas
- Pollution
- Severe storm events
- Climate change



Photos: Dugongs are dependent on seagrass for food. © Edwin Grandcourt

Key Achievements

- CMS Dugong MOU Standardised Dugong Catch and Bycatch Questionnaire (2010)
- Dugong, Seagrass and Coastal Communities Initiative (2012 - ongoing)
- GEF Dugong and Seagrass Conservation Project (2015 - 2019)
- Dugong and Seagrass Research Toolkit (2017)
- IKI Seagrass Ecosystem Services Project (2019 – 2022)

The Dugong MOU and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals that the Dugong MOU contributes to include: SDG1 – No Poverty, SDG2 – Zero Hunger, SDG5 – Gender Equality, SDG12 – Responsible Consumption and Production, SDG13 – Climate Action, SDG14 – Life Below Water and SDG17 – Partnerships for the Goals.

Contact



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For more Fact Sheets please visit: <http://www.cms.int/en/publications/factsheets>



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