UN environment programme

Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

CMS

15 December 2025

Subject: Contribution from the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) to the report of the Secretary-General on the topic of focus of the twenty-sixth meeting of the United Nations Open-Ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea

This note consists of brief descriptions of recent work carried out under CMS relevant to marine ecosystem restoration. It covers the CMS framework, species-based restoration, area-based restoration, threats to marine ecosystems, monitoring and cooperation, and the upcoming 15th Conference of the Parties (COP15) to CMS.

CMS Framework

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) provides a global framework for the conservation and sustainable management of migratory species and their habitats, including those dependent on marine and coastal ecosystems. Given the ecological connectivity inherent to migratory species, CMS Parties have long recognized that effective conservation requires healthy, functioning marine ecosystems across entire migratory ranges. In the Samarkand Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2024–2032 (UNEP/CMS/Resolution 14.1) Goal 2 states that "**[t]he habitats and ranges of migratory species are maintained and restored, supporting their connectivity**". Restoration - including addressing habitat degradation, fragmentation, pollution, and species depletion - is therefore integral to the implementation of CMS.

Goal 2. The habitats and ranges of migratory species are maintained and restored, supporting their connectivity.		
Target 2.1. By 2029, all important habitats for migratory species listed in CMS Appendices are identified, assessed and monitored to ensure their functionality and ability to support migratory species throughout their life cycles.	Target 2.2. By 2032, all important habitats for migratory species listed in CMS Appendices are protected, effectively conserved, managed and restored through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures.	Target 2.3. By 2032, the loss, degradation and fragmentation of important habitats for migratory species listed in CMS Appendices is reduced, and habitats are restored to ensure that such habitats support their viability.

Table 1. Goal 2 and related Targets from the CMS Samarkand Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2024-2032.

In recent years, CMS has advanced a wide range of initiatives to support marine ecosystem restoration, working through species-specific agreements, targeted action plans, cross-cutting resolutions, regional cooperation mechanisms, and technical guidance to Parties. These efforts contribute directly to the objectives of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, and the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

CMS also comprises multiple daughter agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) that contribute to marine ecosystem restoration.

These instruments promote habitat recovery and ecological functionality as essential for species survival. Regularly adopted measures include:

- identification and protection of critical habitats and ecological corridors,
- science-based habitat restoration and mitigation of anthropogenic threats,
- coordinated monitoring across Range States to track ecosystem recovery,
- development of guidance, such as on bycatch reduction, noise pollution, ship-strike mitigation and marine debris management.

By addressing both direct and indirect pressures on migratory species, these instruments together advance transboundary ecosystem restoration.

Species-based restoration

Beyond protecting and conserving the habitats that migratory species rely upon, there is now also an urgent need to recover what has already been degraded, damaged, or destroyed. Well-planned restoration that maintains ecological connectivity can reverse species declines, enable safe migration, and generate co-benefits ranging from climate mitigation to improved community livelihoods. In turn, healthy populations of migratory species can help restore and maintain ecosystem processes through their ecological function, as many CMS-listed marine species play an essential role in ocean ecosystems. Conservation and recovery measures for these species can therefore function as ecosystem restoration actions. Key actions per marine species group are included below.

Marine turtles

One of the daughter agreements to CMS is the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles and their Habitats of the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia (IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU). CMS and the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU support beach habitat restoration, reduction of light pollution, protection of seagrass and coral foraging habitats, and mitigation of bycatch. It has developed many technical reports and capacity-building resources, such as guidance on *Beach Management and Hatchery Practices*, as a capacity-building resource. CMS has further adopted two SSAPs for marine turtles, Resolution 14.11 *Single Species Action Plan for the Hawksbill Turtle (Eretmochelys imbricata) in South-East Asia and the Western Pacific Ocean Region* and Resolution 11.21 *Single Species Action Plan for the Loggerhead Turtle (Caretta caretta) in the South Pacific Ocean*. Healthy turtle populations contribute to seagrass meadow recovery, nutrient cycling and broader ecosystem resilience.

Cetaceans

CMS encompasses two daughter agreements focusing specifically on the conservation of cetaceans and their habitat. The Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS) and the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Adjacent Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS).

Resolution 14.9 *Conservation priorities for cetaceans* emphasized the need to protect and restore cetacean habitats throughout their life cycles and migratory ranges. Through ACCOBAMS and the CMS Working Groups on Aquatic Wild Meat and Bycatch, actions to reduce underwater noise, entanglement, ship strikes, and guidelines on in-water and boat-based interactions are promoted. CMS has also developed a Single Species Action Plan for

the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin (*Sousa teuszii*) and an Action Plan for the Protection and Conservation of South Atlantic Whales. Furthermore, there is Concerted Action 12.2 (Rev.COP14) for Sperm Whales of the Eastern Tropical Pacific, Concerted Action 12.4 (Rev.COP14) for Humpback Whales of the Arabian Sea, and Concerted Action 14.5 for the Franciscana Dolphin. Furthermore, ASCOBANS MOP10 adopted Resolution 10.5 Marine Spatial Planning, including the Guidelines for Cetacean-Sensitive Maritime Spatial Planning. Overall, these actions promote population recovery, strengthen food-web stability and support carbon-sequestration processes.

Sharks and rays

The Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Sharks (Sharks MOU) is a global instrument for the conservation of migratory species of sharks and rays. The CMS Sharks MOU encourages restoration of depleted elasmobranch populations through species action plans, fisheries management reforms, and protection of nursery areas. CMS Resolution 13.3 *Chondrichthyan Species (Sharks, Rays, Skates and Chimaeras)* highlights measures to protect migratory chondrichthyan species against threatening processes, including habitat loss and destruction, Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, as well as fisheries bycatch.

CMS also adopted Resolution 14.12 *Single Species Action Plan for the Angelshark (Squatina squatina) in the Mediterranean Sea* with the goal of promoting the long-term sustainability of its populations and their habitats by reducing the negative effects of human activities through legislation and enforcement, fisheries management measures, research, awareness-raising and capacity-building. There are also two Concerted Actions for shark and ray species: Concerted Action 13.9 (Rev.COP14) for the common guitarfish (*Rhinobatos rhinobatos*) and the bottlenose wedgefish (*Rhynobatus australiae*) and the Concerted Action 14.6 for the blue Shark (*Prionace glauca*).

Dugongs and manatees

CMS supports conservation of West African manatees through an action plan under the Memorandum of Understanding concerning the Conservation of the Manatee and Small Cetaceans of Western Africa and Macaronesia (Western African Aquatic Mammals MOU). This action plan aims to significantly improve the conservation status of the West African manatee across its range through the implementation of strategic policy, research, conservation and awareness actions. Furthermore, CMS has developed a MOU on the Conservation and Management of Dugongs and their Habitats throughout their Range (Dugong MOU) to promote internationally coordinated actions to ensure the long-term survival of dugongs and their seagrass habitats throughout their extensive range. These actions help encourage species recovery and the restoration of vital ecosystems.

The Abu Dhabi Marine Restoration initiative, recognized as a UN World Restoration Flagship, is restoring critical coastal ecosystems for migratory species including coral, seagrass, and mangrove habitats. This will provide feeding and breeding sites for CMS-listed species including 3,000 dugongs (*Dugong dugon*), 4,000 green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) and several seabird species, while also building climate resilience through carbon sequestration in mangrove trees.

In 2025, CMS released an updated Technical Series No. 51 *A Global Assessment of Dugong Status and Conservation Needs*, providing global as well as regional population data and including several restoration initiatives.

Area-based restoration

CMS Parties undertake area-based restoration across several key marine and coastal ecosystems, including in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ). Resolution 14.16 Ecological connectivity outlines key considerations for integrating connectivity into all conservation actions by Parties and other stakeholders.

Ecosystem-based restoration

Under the Dugong MOU, community-based seagrass monitoring, spatial protection and mitigation of coastal-development impacts support habitat recovery and blue-carbon storage. Additional measures and guidance are contained in Resolution 14.8 Conservation and sustainable management of seagrass ecosystems.

Under the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA), Parties undertake mangrove replanting, salt-marsh recovery, and hydrological restoration to support migratory waterbirds. These wetlands provide critical stopover sites and contribute to shoreline stabilization, flood protection, and carbon sequestration.

Area-based measures to restore marine ecosystems

Resolution 12.13 *Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs)* outlines the work of CMS on IMMAs. IMMAs are scientifically identified areas that are particularly important for marine mammals and where efforts can be targeted most effectively to reduce threats and support population recovery. Under the IMMA designation process led by IUCN SSC/WCP Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force, so far, 323 IMMAs have been delineated worldwide, covering 47 CMS-listed species. CMS encourages Parties to use these mapped areas when identifying habitats at risk, designing mitigation measures (for example, in relation to shipping or fisheries), and planning marine protected areas and other area-based measures, including under the BBNJ Agreement and in support of the KMGBF targets.

Resolution 14.7 *Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs)* outlines the work of CMS on ISRAs. ISRAs are expert-delineated habitat areas that are particularly important for one or more species of sharks, rays, and chimaeras. Under the designation process led by the IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group, 686 ISRAs have been identified across seven major ocean regions to date, covering 80 per cent of global waters and encompassing 327 shark and ray species, including all but two species listed under CMS and the Sharks MOU. ISRAs help to highlight priority sites where spatial protection, bycatch reduction, and other measures can strengthen ecological connectivity, resilience and recovery of threatened populations. CMS encourages Parties to integrate ISRAs into national biodiversity strategies, marine spatial planning, and future BBNJ area-based tools.

Important Marine Turtle Areas (IMTAs) follow a similar logic for marine turtles: they are distinct areas that hold biological importance for marine turtle populations, such as key nesting, foraging, developmental, or migratory habitats. The designation process will be led by the IUCN Marine Turtle Specialist Group. Although IMTAs have not yet been delineated, CMS advances this work through the “Blue Corridors for Turtles” initiative, which works to facilitate the creation and establishment of IMTAs for all seven marine turtle species. Once identified, Parties are encouraged to use IMTAs to advise marine spatial planning, fisheries management, and the designation of MPAs and other area-based conservation measures. Additionally, the IOSEA Marine Turtle MOU has established the IOSEA Site Network, which aims to promote the long-term conservation of sites of regional and global importance to marine turtles and their habitats. It currently consists of 15 sites. The network serves as a mechanism for sites to operate more cooperatively and synergistically, both ecologically and administratively.

Through its cooperation with the International Maritime Organization (IMO), CMS promotes the use of Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas (PSSAs) and Areas To Be Avoided (ATBAs) to lower the risk of ecosystem degradation and marine vessel strikes on migratory marine species (CMS Resolution 14.5). By identifying areas where shipping traffic poses a particular threat and steering vessels away from key habitats and migration corridors, these IMO tools provide Parties with a route to reduce collisions while supporting wider marine ecosystem conservation and restoration efforts.

Threats to marine ecosystems

According to the CMS *State of the World's Migratory Species* report (2024), the most common and pervasive threats affecting CMS-listed marine species are habitat loss, pollution, and overexploitation. CMS frameworks address numerous anthropogenic threats that hinder ecosystem restoration. These include Resolution 12.22 *Bycatch*, which outlines CMS work on bycatch. Through guidelines, technical measures, and regional cooperation, CMS helps reduce mortality of migratory species in fisheries, which is an essential condition for restoring ecological functions. CMS also focuses on illegal and unsustainable take through Resolution 11.31 (Rev.COP14) *Illegal and unsustainable taking of wildlife*, and on aquatic wild meat through Resolution 12.15, and Resolution 14.15 *Action Plan to address aquatic Wild Meat Harvests in West Africa*.

Resolution 12.14 *Adverse Impacts of Anthropogenic Noise on Cetaceans and Other Migratory Species* outlines CMS work on underwater noise. The Resolution provides measures to reduce underwater noise during construction, shipping, and military activities, allowing recovery of acoustic habitats critical for cetaceans and other species. CMS has also produced the CMS Family Guidelines on Environmental Impact Assessments for Marine Noise-generating Activities and the Technical Series No.46 Best Available Technology (BAT) and Best Environmental Practice (BEP) for Mitigating Three Noise Sources: Shipping, Seismic Airgun Surveys, and Pile Driving.

CMS promotes actions addressing marine debris (i.e. single-use plastics, fish aggregating devices, etc.), chemical pollution, and ship-strike risk, improving environmental quality necessary for ecosystem recovery through Resolution 12.20 *Management of Marine Debris*. The CMS International Light Pollution Guidelines For Migratory Species outline the process to be followed where there is the potential for artificial lighting to affect wildlife. In addition, CMS encourages nature-based solutions, resilience-building, and integration of climate vulnerability assessments into marine conservation and restoration planning through Resolution 12.21 (Rev.COP14) *Climate change and migratory species*. At COP14, Parties also adopted Resolution 14.6 *Deep-seabed mineral exploitation activities and migratory species*, which calls for better understanding of the impacts of deep-seabed mineral exploitation activities on migratory species, their prey and the ecosystems on which they depend, and to apply the precautionary approach and the principles of ecosystem-based management.

Resolution 14.5 *Reducing the risk of vessel strikes for marine megafauna* outlines measures to reduce the risk of vessel strikes on marine megafauna, including marine mammals, marine turtles, sharks and rays, applying most effective practices and technologies, ensuring that mitigation measures are based on the best available scientific data to achieve positive conservation outcomes.

Multiple Resolutions address the topic of marine wildlife watching. These include Resolution 12.23 (Rev.COP14) *Sustainable tourism and migratory species*, Resolution 11.29 (Rev.COP12) *Sustainable Boat-based Marine Wildlife Watching* and Resolution 12.16 (Rev.COP14) *Recreational in-water interaction with aquatic wildlife*. Combining guidance from these two Resolutions, CMS published Technical Series No. 49 *International Guidelines for Sustainable Marine Wildlife Interactions: Boat-Based and In-Water Activities* (2025).

Other topics addressed by CMS include conservation and social learning, outlined in Resolution 11.23 (Rev.COP12) Conservation Implications of Animal Culture and Social Complexity, and environmental impact assessment, outlined in Resolution 07.02 (Rev.COP14) Impact Assessment and Migratory Species.

Science, monitoring and cooperation

Migratory species rely on connected habitats across national jurisdictions, making transboundary collaboration essential for effective restoration. CMS advances this through:

- Range-State cooperation mechanisms, including joint management plans, data sharing, and coordinated restoration programmes;
- Development of global and regional action plans for priority species groups, integrating restoration priorities;
- Enhanced monitoring systems, such as satellite tracking, population surveys, and community-based monitoring, enabling Parties to evaluate restoration outcomes and adapt management measures;
- Supporting the development of publicly accessible technical reports and series, guidelines, scientific articles, and factsheets.

Furthermore, CMS works closely with a wide range of partners to ensure strong support for marine ecosystem restoration, including ASCOBANS, ACCOBAMS, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), International Whaling Commission (IWC) as well as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), including its Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (DOALOS).

CMS COP15

The 15th Conference of the Parties to CMS will be held in March 2026 in Campo Grande, Brazil. Key marine restoration issues on the agenda include seamount ecosystems, priorities for area-based conservation, ecological connectivity, bycatch, vessel strikes, pollution, deep-seabed mining and underwater noise. The COP will also consider new proposals for aquatic species to be listed on the CMS Appendices, as well as several proposals for Concerted Actions and Action Plans for marine species. All information on COP15 is available at https://www.cms.int/cop15docs.