

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL ON OCEANS AND THE LAW OF THE SEA

CONTRIBUTION FROM THE CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES

June 2024

1. The 14th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals ([CMS COP14](#)) was held from 12-17 February 2024 in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. Resolutions, [Decisions](#) and Concerted Actions were adopted on over 100 distinct topics by representatives of the 133 Parties globally. Despite COP14 being held in a doubly-landlocked country, many of the outcomes address conservation priorities for aquatic species, including marine turtles.
2. The final Resolutions and Decisions of COP14 can be found at the following pages:
 - [Resolutions in Effect](#)
 - [Decisions in Effect](#)

They can also be found on the [COP14 meeting page](#).

Overexploitation

3. Among the drivers of biodiversity loss, overexploitation of natural resources is one of the most direct and pervasive, affecting both target and non-target species across all ocean regions.
4. In Decisions: 14 31 -33 COP14 has agreed new mandates on **Bycatch and Other Fisheries-Induced Mortality** as a key aspect of overexploitation of marine species listed in the CMS Appendices.
5. Parties are requested to incorporate the FAO Technical Guidelines and associated Technology Fact Sheets (2023) to mitigate bycatch of marine mammals by adopting alternative fishing gears and best scientific practices. Additionally, **Parties are encouraged to apply the recommendations from Drynan and Baker (2023).**
6. For Range States of the Baltic Proper Harbour Porpoise, the mandates require the urgent implementation of effective bycatch mitigation measures, with progress reports due at the next CMS Conference of the Parties.
7. The Scientific Council (ScC) is tasked with identifying priority regions for reviewing bycatch levels of CMS-listed marine mammals and turtles in both commercial and artisanal fisheries. They are to collaborate with relevant organizations to develop regional reviews and appropriate bycatch mitigation measures, focusing on the highest-priority fisheries and areas. The Council is also tasked with reviewing current knowledge about measures to reduce and mitigate bycatch of marine turtles and preparing recommendations for effective strategies that do not disadvantage other CMS-listed species.
8. The ScC is further requested to collaborate with the Advisory Committee of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Sharks (Sharks MOU) and other stakeholders to review data on fisheries-induced mortality of CMS- and Sharks MOU-listed shark and ray species and to prepare recommendations for reducing mortality.
9. Cross-referencing with seabird bycatch work is necessary to ensure comprehensive strategies across taxa. The Council is also required to synthesize bycatch mitigation strategies across various species and update Resolution 12.22 on Bycatch for COP15.
10. COP14 also addressed the issue of **Aquatic Wild Meat**, a root cause of

overexploitation for many migratory species and adopted new Decision 187-189 on Aquatic Wild Meat in general and Decisions 190-193 on the Action Plan to address Aquatic Wild Meat Harvest in West Africa alongside the Action Plan itself.

11. Parties agreed to support the implementation of the Action Plan to Address Aquatic Wild Meat Harvests in West Africa by providing technical and capacity-building assistance. Additionally, they are encouraged to develop action plans to reduce aquatic wild meat hunting and consumption in regions such as East, South-East, and South Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific Islands. This initiative aims to curb unsustainable practices and promote conservation efforts across multiple regions.
12. The Scientific Council, through its Aquatic Wild Meat Working Group, is tasked with several key actions. These include developing criteria for including certain sharks and rays, collecting information on seabird harvests, and assessing the migratory nature and conservation relevance of crocodylians and freshwater chelonians. They are also responsible for supporting studies on the socio-cultural, nutritional, and legal aspects of aquatic wild meat use and trade, promoting environmental education, and evaluating the effectiveness of existing legislation.
13. Parties that are Range States to the Action Plan are requested to prioritize immediate actions and those slated for delivery by 2025 and 2026, establish national working groups to enhance stakeholder collaboration, and report on their implementation progress using a template provided by the Secretariat before COP15. The ScC is to support the Secretariat in developing a reporting template, review Party reports, prepare summaries and analyses, and make recommendations for further implementation of the Action Plan. The Secretariat, in collaboration with the Scientific Council, will create and disseminate this reporting form to ensure timely reporting and assessment before COP15.
14. COP14 adopted three new **Single Species Action Plans (SSAPs)** developed for threatened marine species heavily affected by fisheries induced mortality amongst other threats. Each of the three SSAPs is accompanied by a Resolution and a set of Decisions:
 - Hawksbill Turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) in South-East Asia and the Western Pacific Ocean Region
 - Resolution 14.11 [Single Species Action Plan for the Hawksbill Turtle \(*Eretmochelys imbricata*\) in South-East Asia and the Western Pacific Ocean Region](#)
 - Decisions 14.96 – 14.100
 - Atlantic Humpback Dolphin (*Sousa teuszii*)
 - Resolution 14.10 [Single Species Action Plan for the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin \(*Sousa teuszii*\)](#)
 - Decisions 14.81 – 14.86
 - Angelshark (*Squatina squatina*) in the Mediterranean
 - Resolution 14.12 [Single Species Action Plan for the Angelshark \(*Squatina squatina*\) in the Mediterranean Sea](#)
 - Decisions: 14.101-14.105

Area-based Conservation

15. COP14 has agreed a number of marine area-based conservation tools and initiatives aimed at conserving critical habitats for CMS-listed aquatic species. These initiatives are crucial for achieving the Convention's central goal of habitat conservation. They also support the implementation of Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

16. Parties reemphasised the importance of **Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs)** by adopting Decision 14.57-14.60 requesting Parties to use IMMAs, identified by the IUCN SSC/WCPA Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force, for identifying habitats at risk, designing threat mitigation measures, and designating marine protected areas to support the conservation of CMS-listed marine mammals. Parties are further encouraged to apply the IMMA criteria in regions not yet assessed by the IUCN SSC/WCPA. The ScC is requested to collaborate with the IUCN SSC/WCPA Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force to incorporate data on CMS-listed marine mammals in the identification of IMMAs.
17. Under CMS, a new initiative to identify **Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs)** gained momentum through the adoption of Resolution 14.7 [Important Shark and Ray Areas \(ISRAs\)](#). Led by the Shark Specialist Group of the IUCN Species Survival Commission, this initiative aims to pinpoint critical habitats for sharks to enhance area-based conservation and management efforts for this taxonomic group worldwide. In Decisions 14.61-14.64 Parties are requested to support the identification of new **ISRAs**, integrate these areas into spatial planning and conservation actions in line with target 3 of the Global Biodiversity Framework. Additionally, Parties and organizations are encouraged to engage with and support the IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group in the global identification of ISRAs.
18. **Seagrass Ecosystems** are critically important for many migratory marine species, including dugongs, marine turtles, and sharks. They play a fundamental role in global fisheries production, serving as valuable nursery habitats for over one-fifth of the world's largest 25 fisheries. To support the protection of these important ecosystems CMS Parties adopted Resolution 14.8 [Conservation and sustainable management of seagrass ecosystems](#) accompanied by Decisions 14.65-68 requesting Parties to identify nationally significant migratory species dependent on seagrass meadows, assess threats to seagrass ecosystems, and propose conservation actions, emphasizing their integration into marine protected areas and spatial planning.
19. COP14 also addressed the growing impact of **vessel strikes** (often referred to as ship strikes) on marine megafauna. Parties adopted Resolution 14.5 [Reducing the risk of vessel strikes for marine megafauna](#) and a draft Decisions on the topic as well as specific guidance for Whale Sharks. The latter is based on the findings of the CMS report "Limiting Global Ship Strikes on Whale Sharks: Understanding an Increasing Threat to the World's Largest Fish", available as [UNEP/CMS/COP14/Inf.27.2.3](#). Parties are requested to enhance efforts in mitigating vessel strikes on whales, dolphins, and porpoises by encouraging systematic reporting of incidents to the Ship Strikes Database of the International Whaling Commission (IWC). The ScC was asked to collaborate with the IWC and IMO to map shipping lanes against Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) and recommend mitigation measures, as well as to assess collision risks for further CMS-listed marine megafauna and identify priority conservation areas, aligning efforts with Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs) and future Important Marine Turtle Areas (IMTAs). The Secretariat will support these efforts, liaising with the IMO to implement mitigation measures and highlighting key reports and recommendations to reduce vessel strikes on CMS-listed species.

Deep-seabed Mineral Exploitation Activities

20. Resolution 14.6 [Deep-seabed mineral exploitation activities and migratory species](#) was adopted, which urges Parties not to engage in or support deep-seabed mineral exploitation activities until sufficient and robust scientific information has been obtained to ensure that deep-seabed mineral exploitation activities do not cause harmful effects to migratory species, their prey, and their ecosystems; and encourages Parties to ensure that the impacts of deep-seabed mineral exploitation activities on migratory species are fully considered in the development and implementation of any regulatory framework

under national legislation and under the ISA. Decisions 14.51-14.53 request the ScC to develop a report on the state of knowledge of the impacts of deep-seabed mineral exploitation activities on migratory species, their prey and their ecosystems, including identifying knowledge gaps that should be addressed.

Marine Pollution

21. Decisions 14.35-14.37 on **Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs)** request Parties to address the potential adverse impacts of FADs on CMS-listed species, including entanglement risks for sharks, rays, turtles, and marine mammals. They should ensure FADs within their jurisdiction or flagged by their vessels are non-entangling, regularly inspected, and responsibly maintained to prevent loss and minimize impacts on marine ecosystems and migratory routes. Parties are requested to promote biodegradable materials in FAD construction, enhance real-time reporting of lost gear, and collaborate with fisheries organizations to phase out entangling FAD designs to curb ghost fishing and environmental harm. Efforts should also focus on scientific research to develop sustainable FAD solutions and integrate environmental controls into fishing licenses and global plastics treaty frameworks. The ScC was requested to establish principles for best practice to avoid loss of FADs, entanglement with marine wildlife, beaching in corals, mangroves and other aquatic and coastal habitats. This should include liaison with the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF), further to their work on improving FAD design, and the relevant fisheries organizations.
22. Decisions 14.41 – 14.43 on **Marine Pollution** request Parties to integrate strategies addressing marine pollution into conservation plans for migratory marine species, focusing on understanding and mitigating pollution-induced threats such as chemicals, oil spills, and plastic pellets. The Scientific Council is tasked with identifying priority pollution types affecting CMS-listed species, assessing cumulative impacts, and pinpointing critical areas of intersection between pollution and migratory species. Collaboration with relevant agreements and fora is emphasized, including workshops to prioritize species and habitats for immediate action, supported by expert guidance. The Secretariat is directed to support these scientific endeavors and enhance cooperation with UN bodies and environmental agreements to combat marine pollution effectively, including efforts related to plastic pollution and BBNJ.
23. Decisions 14.44 – 14.47 on **Marine Noise** requests Parties to disseminate and apply the CMS Family Guidelines on Environmental Impact Assessment for Marine Noise-generating Activities across relevant national departments, emphasizing their role in decision-making on noise-generating activities. Additionally, Parties are asked to utilize Technical Series No. 46 on Best Available Technology for mitigating noise from activities like shipping and seismic surveys, advocating its adoption in marine spatial planning and licensing processes. The Joint Noise Working Group of CMS, ACCOBAMS, and ASCOBANS is tasked with conducting a peer review of updated Technical Support Information, preparing a gap analysis, and assessing noise impacts on CMS-listed freshwater mammal species, reporting progress to the Scientific Council. Meanwhile, the Scientific Council is responsible for advising on mitigation measures, ensuring timely guidance, and assessing the need for further guidance on marine noise impacts, including freshwater cetaceans, and presenting recommendations at COP15.

Guidelines for Recreational In-water Interactions with Marine Wildlife

24. Guidelines for Recreational In-water Interactions with Marine Wildlife were adopted through Resolution 12.16 (Rev.COP14) [Recreational in-water interaction with aquatic wildlife](#) with associated Decisions 14.54-56.

25. The Guidelines present considerations and guidelines to assist countries in adopting appropriate measures to regulate in-water recreational interactions with marine mammals, marine turtles, large fish and seabirds in their area of jurisdiction. They aim to avoid and mitigate disturbance and adverse effects from in-water interactions on the target species and associated habitats, including both long-term detrimental effects on population demographics (e.g., survival, reproduction) and shorter-term impacts on individual behaviour and welfare. The Guidelines provide examples, considerations and suggestions to develop, adjust or validate decisions and regulations governing recreational in-water interactions, helping governments to identify how to manage these activities effectively in the specific local contexts.

Marine Mammals

26. Resolution 14.9 [Conservation priorities for cetaceans](#) was adopted (repealing Res.10.15 (Rev.COP12) *Global Programme of Work for Cetaceans*). Decisions 14.69 – 14.73 requests Parties to prioritize the conservation of cetaceans by reviewing regional priorities and detailed recommendations outlined in Resolution 14.9, focusing on urgent threats and coordinating regionally where possible. Additionally, Parties are urged to engage in negotiations for an international legally binding instrument to address plastic pollution, support the BBNJ Agreement for robust Environmental Impact Assessments, and integrate cetacean conservation into National Biodiversity Strategies aligned with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The Scientific Council, with support from the Aquatic Mammals Working Group, is tasked with quantifying contemporary takes of CMS Appendix I-listed cetaceans globally, assessing climate-induced migration impacts on cetacean welfare and conservation, recommending standard protocols for mortality investigations, reporting on 'Out of Habitat' cetaceans, synthesizing research on cetacean welfare's impact on conservation, and reviewing recommendations for future actions.
27. Decisions on 14.74 – 14.75 on the Role of cetaceans in ecosystem functioning request the ScC to provide advice and input with regards to expanding the work on the role of cetaceans in ecosystem functioning in close collaboration with the IWC through the Aquatic Mammals Working Group.
28. Decisions 14. 76 – 14.78 requests Parties to collaborate with the Secretariat to develop an **Action Plan focused on cetacean conservation in the Red Sea region** and to support the organization of a regional workshop. The Scientific Council, aided by the Aquatic Mammal Working Group, is tasked with providing advice and input for the Action Plan's development, as well as reviewing the final draft at the Sessional Committee meeting preceding COP15 and making recommendations to Parties accordingly.
29. Decisions 14.79-14.80 on the **Action Plan for the Protection and Conservation of South Atlantic Whales** requests Parties to report on progress in implementing the Action, detailing measures taken and their effectiveness. The Secretariat is asked to facilitate a regional workshop aimed at enhancing capacity for implementing the Action Plan. Furthermore, the Secretariat will maintain collaboration with the International Whaling Commission (IWC) to support the ongoing implementation efforts concerning South Atlantic whale conservation.
30. Further Decisions were adopted for **Sirenians, Pinnipeds and Otters** (Decisions 14.87 – 14.92)

Marine Turtles

31. Decisions 14.93-14.95 on **Marine Turtles** requests the ScC to assess scientific

information on marine turtles in a region-specific and species-specific context, focusing on their vulnerability to climate change, the impacts of plastic and light pollution on post-hatchlings, and the identification of resilient habitats. Based on this assessment, the Scientific Council will develop new recommendations for all CMS-listed marine turtle species included in Appendices I or II, emphasizing the preservation of current nesting sites and identification of new ones, and proposing management strategies like beach cooling and restoration projects to mitigate climate change impacts on nesting beaches.

Fish

32. Decisions 14.106 – 14.109 on **European Eels requests** Parties that are Range States to the European Eel to provide support for the development of an Action Plan.
33. Further Decisions were adopted to assess the status of **Implementation of the CMS Appendix I-Listing for the Oceanic Whitetip Shark (*Carcharhinus longimanus*)** (Decisions 14.114 – 14.116) and to prepare legislative guidance materials and model laws to support the implementation of Article III (5) of the Convention regarding the prohibition of the taking of Appendix I-listed chondrichthyan species (Decisions 14.117 – 14.118).

Amendment of Appendices

34. COP14 listed the following new species in its Appendices
 - *Tursiops truncatus gephyreus* (Appendix I & II)
 - *Phocoena phocoena* - Baltic Proper population (Appendix I)
 - *Carcharias taurus* (Appendix I & II)
 - *Glaucostegus cemiculus* (Appendix II) // Mediterranean Sea population (Appendix I & II)
 - *Aetomylaeus bovinus* (Appendix II) // Mediterranean Sea population (Appendix I & II)
 - *Rhinoptera marginata* (Appendix II) // Mediterranean Sea population (Appendix I & II)