

New MoU for the Conservation of Small Cetaceans and Manatees in Western Africa signed in Togo



CMS has acquired a new member of its family of regional species agreements – an MoU to conserve small whales and manatees in western Africa.

The second inter-governmental meeting on Western African and Macaronesian aquatic mammals, titled “**WATCH – Western African Talks on Cetaceans and their Habitats**”, was hosted by the Ministry of Environment of Togo in Lomé, Togo on 2-3 of October. 22 of the 29 Range States were represented at the meeting, which had almost 50 participants, including scientific advisors and members of the CMS staff. At the conclusion of the meeting, 15 country representatives (Angola, Benin, Cape Verde, Chad, Congo Brazzaville, Cote d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Togo) signed a new CMS **Memorandum of Understanding Concerning the Conservation of the Manatee**



and Small Cetaceans of Western Africa and Macaronesia and adopted two Action Plans for these species as annexes to the MoU. The MoU came into effect immediately on 3 October 2008 and will stay open for signature indefinitely. Three non-governmental organisations co-signed as well: Wetlands International Africa, Wildlife Trust and GSM (Society for the Conservation of Marine Mammals).

The Signatories of the Memorandum

Eight years after a CMS-led workshop in Conakry, Guinea in May 2000, at which the idea for this agreement first took shape, the need to conserve and raise awareness of western Africa’s marine mammals is as pressing as ever. Various threats, including direct and accidental catch, coastal development, pollution and habitat degradation, have caused western African marine mammal populations to decline rapidly. These issues require action on a national, regional and global level. The WATCH meetings and related activities under the auspices of CMS are an important part of the progress made in this field and can play a vital role in future conservation efforts.

Marco Barbieri (CMS Agreement Officer), who represented the CMS Secretariat at the meeting, said: “We trust the conclusion of this new instrument will constitute a milestone for the conservation of marine mammals in the western African and Macaronesian region. This MoU helps to facilitate transboundary cooperation for the conservation of these species by providing an international platform for the negotiation and coordinated implementation of research and conservation measures. In this regard, this CMS initiative has the potential for significant synergies with other

actors in the region. Rather than trying to replace any other initiative, CMS seeks to provide a suitable legal and institutional framework that could facilitate their implementation and further development, promote synergies, reduce duplication and optimise use of resources, thereby adding value to existing tools addressing related issues.”

Congratulating the Secretariat team and all participants, the CMS Executive Secretary Robert Hepworth said: “The new agreement in western Africa is the fourth in our network of regional agreements which now conserve migratory cetaceans in key areas of the Mediterranean Sea, Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and beyond. Concluding this agreement, and obtaining so many signatories on the spot, is a real boost for marine conservation in the run-up to the CMS Conference of Parties in December. Now we need to encourage Portugal, Spain and the remaining western African Range States to sign the MoU. I hope CMS Parties as a whole will agree in December to work in partnership with the Range States to get the agreement working effectively across this enormous and critical area.”

The meeting in Lomé was made possible by generous financial and in kind contributions from the Governments of France, Monaco, Spain and Togo and the tour operator TUI.

Additional information on the WATCH initiative can be found here:
<http://www.cms.int/species/waam/index.htm>



The Chair of the WATCH II Meeting, Mr Kotchikpa Okoumassou, signs the MoU on behalf of the government of Togo, before Mr Marco Barbieri's signature on behalf of the CMS Secretariat

