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Regional Seas and the Convention on Migratory Species

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As an environmental treaty under the auspice of the United Nations, the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) provides a global platform for the conservation and sustainable use of migratory animals and the places where they live. The Convention encourages the Range States to comply with global or regional Agreements. The Agreements may range from legally binding treaties to less formal instruments, such as Memoranda of Understanding, and can be adapted to the requirements of a particular region. The development of models tailored according to the conservation needs throughout the migratory range is a unique capacity of CMS. All Agreements are based on concrete management and conservation plans.

Since 1990, more than a dozen international agreements have been concluded under the CMS umbrella for bats, birds, deer, elephants, dolphins, whales, marine turtles and seals. At their last CoP in 2005, CMS Parties also gave the Convention a remit to negotiate a global instrument for the conservation of migratory sharks.

Marine mammal conservation is a cross-cutting issue relevant to several Multilateral Environmental Agreements especially the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES), the International Whaling Commission (IWC), the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

Marine mammals are species that spend the majority of their lives in or near the sea and include whales, dolphins, manatees, dugongs, sea otters, seals and even polar bears. Many species of marine mammals are threatened worldwide. Culling, direct and accidental catch, coastal development, habitat alteration and degradation, pollution and ocean noise constitute the main threats. In 2004 UNEP Regional Seas and CMS developed a publication, "Review of Small Cetaceans – Distribution, Behaviour, Migration and Threats", which summarizes the available knowledge of odontocete (toothed whale) distribution, behavior, migration and threats.

Under CMS, two regional agreements focus on the conservation of cetaceans within the Baltic, North-East Atlantic, Black Sea and Mediterranean Regional Seas programmes. The Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic and North Seas (ASCOBANS), entered into force in 1994 and the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS), entered into force in 2001. A third regional agreement (in the form of a non-binding MoU) for Pacific Island Cetaceans, developed jointly by CMS and SPREP, was opened for signature on 15 September 2006, and has already received enough support to bring it swiftly into effect. Further agreements for the E and W Atlantic are under consideration.

The Regional Seas Programme, CMS and the Abidjan Convention with the support of the Government of Monaco are joining forces to develop a Conservation Strategy for the West African Manatee (*Trichechus senegalensis*) throughout its range. A CMS agreement to protect the dugong SE Asia is at an advanced stage of negotiation.

UNEP is committed to the protection of marine mammals at both global and regional levels through partnerships with its Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans and biodiversity-related conventions: the Convention on Biological Diversity, CITES, Ramsar, World Heritage, and particularly the Convention on Migratory Species. CMS is also committed to work closely with the Regional Seas organisations, both collectively, and through individual partnerships. During the last year both the Caribbean and South Pacific RS bodies have signed specific partnership agreements with CMS. The Convention Secretariat would be pleased to explore the scope for further partnerships oriented towards practical outcomes for marine conservation.

In 2007, CMS will oversee a new global campaign under UN auspices – “Year of the Dolphin 2007”. There is considerable scope for co-operation between CMS, the Regional Seas and our other partners (including major commercial sponsors) in rolling out this initiative, which was launched in Monaco on 17 September 2006. Further details can be found at www.yod2007.org