



A GLOBAL DECLARATION FOR RIVER DOLPHINS & THEIR RIVERS

A Pathway To Securing Their Future

River dolphins¹ are extraordinary. They are top predators in some of the world's greatest river systems, and yet they are often undervalued and overlooked. They are still holding on, even though all six species live in rivers that face a barrage of threats. But they are only just holding on; all species are classified as either Endangered or Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. A seventh river dolphin species, the Chinese river dolphin or baiji, was declared likely extinct in 2007, and since the 1980s the numbers of all river dolphin species have plummeted by 73%,² with water infrastructure, unsustainable fishing, and pollution threatening their existence.

River dolphins are important indicators of the health of the rivers where they live; rivers that are also the lifeblood of huge economies and hundreds of millions of people. Where freshwater dolphin populations are thriving, it is likely that the overall river systems and fish stocks are flourishing – as well as the countless other wildlife species, communities, and companies that depend on them for fish, drinking and irrigation water, and transportation.

We need to act now to protect these important animals, their rivers, and the communities that rely on them.

Conservation efforts around the world have been successful in halting the decline of some river dolphin species. In China, after decades of seemingly irreversible decline, results from the latest census of critically endangered Yangtze finless porpoises shows a 23% increase in population over the past five years - the first increase since records began. In Indonesia, innovative pinger devices have successfully kept dolphins from dying due to entanglement in gill nets, while also increasing fish catches for local communities - a win-win!

1. We use the term 'river dolphins' for all six river cetacean species: Amazon river dolphin, Ganges river dolphin, Indus river dolphin, Irrawaddy dolphin, Tucuxi, and the only freshwater porpoise in the world, the Yangtze finless porpoise.

2. WWF (2022) Living Planet Report 2022 – Building a nature positive society. Almond, R.E.A., Grooten, M., Juffe Bignoli, D. & Petersen, T. (Eds). WWF, Gland, Switzerland.

Why is a Global Declaration critical?

Knowledge-based conservation

Despite significant progress being made, there are still river dolphin species for which we lack knowledge of population numbers and their geographical ranges. We also need more information about fish populations, water quality, and water quantity in river dolphin rivers. Strong stakeholder collaboration can increase this foundation of critical information and enable us to reach our full global potential for conserving river dolphins and the health of the rivers where they live. An important part of this is to leverage and build the knowledge and expertise of the communities that live alongside the dolphins.

Working Together

The main threats to river dolphin populations can only be tackled when approached at every level: governmental (legislation and its implementation), community (inclusive conservation and sustainable practices), private sector (effective stewardship), and NGOs (innovation, learning, implementation support).

Strengthening Protection

All river dolphin species are endangered or critically endangered, most populations are declining, and the threats they face are increasing. A solid network of well-managed protected areas can change this situation, and these can only be effective when all stakeholders join forces: governments, communities, research institutes, companies, NGOs and financiers.

We have the momentum; now we need concerted global action to save these iconic species. We need a **Real Deal for River Dolphins**: the signing of a Global Declaration for River Dolphins, in order to double the river dolphin populations in Asia and stop their populations declining in South America.

Participants

14 range-country high-level government representatives

NGO & CSO coalition (expert NGOs, humanitarian CSOs, and universities)

UN and Convention representatives (IWC, Ramsar, CBD)

Funding agencies (WB, ADB, IDB, GEF)

Private sector representatives

PLEDGE TO

Promote and celebrate World River Dolphin Day, building awareness

Engage with industries to tackle water quality and quantity issues

Drive river dolphin research and threat monitoring

Eradicate unsustainable fishing practices

Create a network of protected river habitats

Increase river dolphin site management effectiveness

Participants will convene at a World River Dolphin Day event to sign the Global Declaration for River Dolphins and make commitments to implement specific and game-changing actions that progress the delivery of these pledges; actions that are to be implemented in the near term, and which will be reviewed and celebrated each year on World River Dolphin Day.

Care & Conservation

Communities, governments, and businesses being custodians of the river dolphins

Tackling Threats

Healthy rivers, fisheries practices and laws; the preservation of habitat integrity

Better Protection

A well-managed network of protected areas for river dolphins

RIVER DOLPHIN RANGE COUNTRIES:

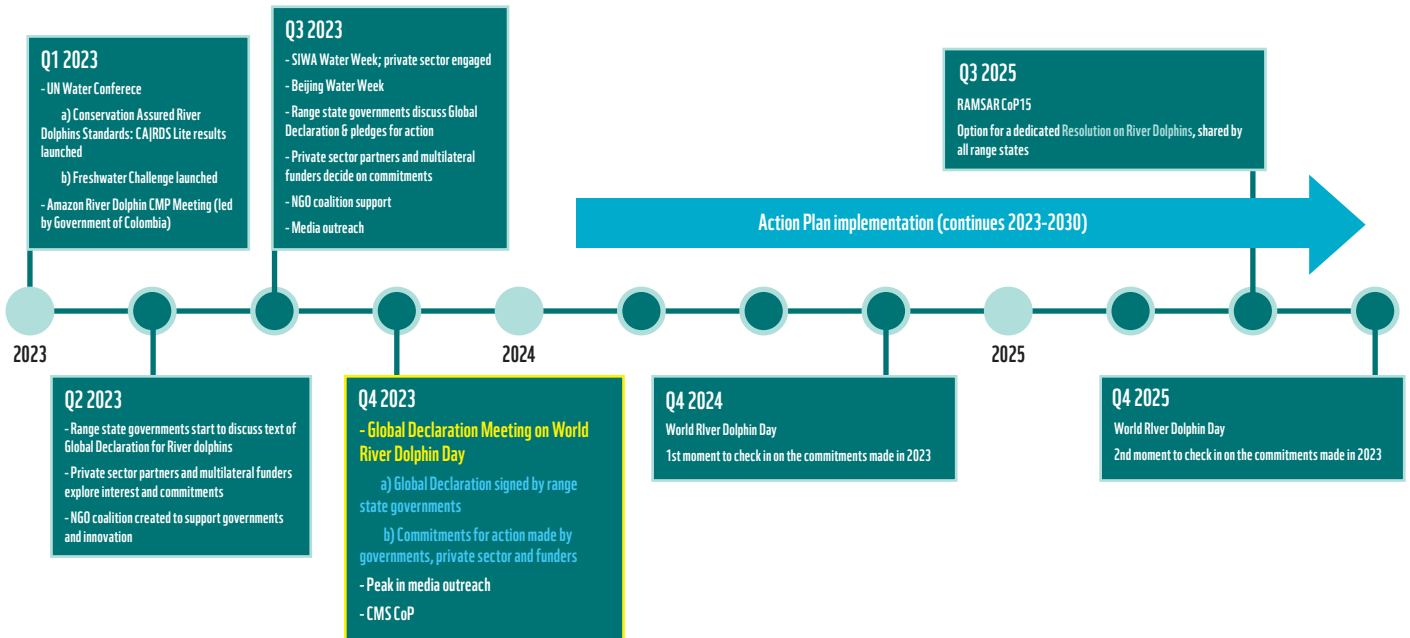
**BANGLADESH, BOLIVIA, BRAZIL,
CAMBODIA, CHINA, COLOMBIA,
ECUADOR, INDIA, INDONESIA,
MYANMAR, NEPAL, PAKISTAN,
PERU, VENEZUELA**

**“CHANGING THE CONSERVATION
TRAJECTORY OF AN ENDANGERED
SPECIES REQUIRES THE HIGHEST
LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT SUPPORT.
A MULTI-COUNTRY EVENT FOCUSED
ON A SINGLE SPECIES CAN BE A
CONSERVATION GAME CHANGER.”**

**- WWF's Stuart Chapman, based on
his experience with the St. Petersburg
Declaration for Tigers, 2010**

Through this Declaration process we will build a global movement for river dolphin appreciation and conservation; for the dolphins, for the rivers, and for the people. Many countries already recognise the importance of river dolphins species and are stepping up efforts to conserve them – this is needed in all river dolphin range countries, alongside collaboration beyond borders to learn from each other’s experiences, exchange good practices, and provide organisational support for activities on the continental and global scale. #TogetherPossible

Roadmap: Global Declaration for River Dolphins & Action Plan



© Brent Stirton / Getty Images / WWF-UK

**YOUR SUPPORT IS
CRITICAL TO MAKING
THIS HAPPEN.**

WWF teams in river dolphin countries and around the world will be working alongside governments, communities, funding agencies, and the private sector to help deliver the Global Declaration and the associated pledges for action. Organisations that are committed to reducing poverty, protecting the environment, and promoting sustainable development are incredibly important partners on this journey. Your knowledge, advice, and implementation support are key to the success of the Declaration process and beyond. We hope we can work together to maximise the impact of the Global Declaration pledges, thereby strengthening the protection of river dolphins and the rivers where they live and helping the millions of people who depend on those rivers for their food security and income.



© Nay Jinknss / WWF - Brasil