



PRESS RELEASE

18th October 2017

Their Future is Our Future: Fresh hope for Africa's ocean wildlife and all who depend on it

18th October 2017/Wädenswil, Switzerland: Several high-profile and international organizations will launch a new non-binding multi-stakeholder partnership to curb the capture, trade and consumption of endangered, threatened or protected aquatic mammals, reptiles and birds in West and Central Africa. The announcement of the Abidjan Aquatic Wildlife Partnership will take place during the 12th session of the Convention on Migratory Species Conference of the Parties (CMS CoP12). The convention will be held in Manila, The Philippines from 22nd- 28th October. OceanCare, the USAID-funded West Africa Biodiversity and Climate Change (WA- BiCC) Program, Wild Migration and the World Bank have supported the Abidjan Secretariat in forming the Partnership. Together these organisations will draw attention to the plight of aquatic species including endangered, threatened and protected species, and support governments, the private sector and local communities to take the critical steps to ensure their survival.

Evidence shows that the majority of countries in West and Central Africa contribute to the over-harvest of aquatic wildlife in several ways. This includes by-catch, as well as other forms of capture for human consumption, fishing bait, traditional medicine and other uses. While wild animals have always been a food source, increased global population and demand has led to the drastic over-exploitation of several species. Illegal, under regulated and/or fishing on several levels – from the local to the international – has threatened not only the species themselves but the local and national economies who depend on a well-managed aquatic resource base. The capture and consumption of species such as dolphins, whales, manatees, crocodiles and sea turtles, known as 'aquatic wild meat', is 'falling through the cracks' between environment and fisheries ministries, agencies and international processes. Private companies troll the waters off the West and Central African coasts and capture not only targeted species, but several others that become trapped in their nets.

The Convention of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) provides an ideal setting for the launch of the **Abidjan Aquatic Wildlife Partnership**¹. The slogan for this year's conference is "**Their Future is Our Future: Sustainable Development for Wildlife and People**", a fitting concept for the launch of the partnership, which seeks to address links between the degradation of natural habitats and species, and issues of poverty, food security, human health including impacts on local and national economies. Many drivers behind the increased demand for aquatic wild meat are the same issues identified within the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A growing reliance of people on unsustainable food sources such as endangered, threatened or protected species has clear implications for the future economic prosperity and well-being of people, but also represents a grave conservation and animal welfare concern.

- In West and Central Africa alone, at least 20 countries are known to carry out specialized hunts for the West African Manatee.
- Cetaceans are killed and their meat is consumed at high levels throughout the region. Ghana is thought to represent a particular hotspot in the region for hunts of dolphins and small whales with at least 16 species affected. In some cases, dolphins are landed as by-catch but directed hunts also occur and in some places where they are used as shark bait.
- Sea turtles are killed for their meat and shells, as well as their eggs. As females lay the eggs, poachers collect them and often kill the females at the same time. Turtle meat is regularly sold in African countries including Nigeria, Mauritania, Cabo Verde, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, and Guinea.
- Aquatic species are also killed for medicinal and ornamental purposes. For example, turtles are used for traditional medicine in the Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Togo and Benin. Turtle shells are sold to tourists throughout the region.
- Crocodiles are caught and killed in significant numbers for meat which is sold in markets in Nigeria.

¹ Abidjan Aquatic Wildlife Partnership - 23 October 2017, Session B: 13.45-14.30, Meeting Rm 6

Aquatic Wild Meat at CMS CoP12

At CMS CoP12, governments will consider adopting a resolution which highlights issues that affect many migratory aquatic species listed in the appendices of CMS. In particular it expresses concern that these species are being harvested in an illegal or unregulated manner and that demand for the meat or other products of these species is increasing. The resolution asks that CMS gives the issue increased attention by setting up an international working group of experts to focus on the issue and to provide advice to governments. The hope is that the outcome of the new CMS Aquatic Wild Meat Working Group, if agreed by the parties, would benefit the Abidjan Aquatic Wildlife Partnership and work collaboratively within or alongside it.

The organisations supporting the development and of the Abidjan Aquatic Wildlife Partnership will not only be encouraging governments to adopt this resolution but also to take this fight back to their home countries and reinforce their commitment to ensuring that endangered and threatened migratory aquatic species not only survive, but thrive.

Notes to editors

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The experts will be available for interviews at the margins of the side event launching the partnership on Monday, 23 October 2017, from 13.45-14.30 in meeting room no. 6.

Links and further information

Abidjan Aquatic Wildlife Partnership website landing page (currently under construction) www.abidjanwildlife.org

Convention on Migratory Species website: <http://www.cms.int/en>

Abidjan Convention Website: <http://abidjanconvention.org>

OceanCare briefings, reports and photo material:

Aquatic Wild Meat and the Sustainable Development Goals:
https://www.oceancare.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Briefing_Aquatic_Wild_Meat_SDG_170530.pdf

All OceanCare policy briefings for CMS (in En, Fr, Es)

<https://www.oceancare.org/en/our-work/international-collaboration/conference-documents/>

Media briefing, side event invitation, images and other material (credits indicated in brackets):

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/z83qoqp7gd35te2/AACGpAZ1MGkvEIKCIqHhVy7Ha?dl=0>

Background report:

https://oceancare.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Report_Manati_Meeresschildkr%20c3%b6ten_CMS_Aquatic-Bushmeat_EN_2016.pdf

WA-BiCC briefings and reports:

WA BiCC Brochure- <https://www.dropbox.com/s/6oib38mi38vw6m0/WABICC%20BROCHURE%2017-1-17.pdf?dl=0>

- Component 1 Brief- <https://www.dropbox.com/s/kg1m4z10am87q0a/Component%201%20Brief%2018-1-17.pdf?dl=0>

- Component 2 Brief- <https://www.dropbox.com/s/79mhp4s1yweuh16/Component%20Brief%2021-06-17.pdf?dl=0>

- Component 3 Brief- <https://www.dropbox.com/s/upirrt8mknz8uw6/Component%20Brief%203%2012-15-16.pdf?dl=0>

- Threats Assessment Activity Brief- <https://www.dropbox.com/s/x0ztu2wm1lspy75/Biodiversity%20Threats%20Assessment%20Brief-%20Eng.pdf?dl=0>

WA BiCC CITES Documentary part 2- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=89euYhDbgOs&t=5s>

Statements from Partners

Abidjan Convention Secretariat

www.abidjanconvention.org

"It is time now that we address the issue of illegal trade of aquatic wildlife which affects the life of many in Africa. It's our sincere hope that this partnership will lay down the foundations for an effective mechanism to fight against illegal trade of aquatic wildlife in the region".

OceanCare

www.oceancare.org

"OceanCare is committed to the protection of marine wildlife and is proud to be a founding partner of the Abidjan Aquatic Wildlife Partnership. OceanCare is committed to using its influence at international levels to elevate political commitment to address the aquatic wild meat issue and will also be working at local and regional levels to build greater understanding of the scale and scope of the problem, its underlying causes and the actions that must be taken to address it. Conservation and sustainable development are intrinsically linked and OceanCare will be working with partners to define and advocate for solutions that benefit both local communities and wildlife".

WA BiCC

www.wabicc.org

"WA BiCC is committed to the conservation of wildlife including endangered, threatened and protected (ETP) aquatic species that are often forgotten, and is proud to be a founding partner of the Abidjan Aquatic Wildlife Partnership. WA BiCC seeks to build capacity of West African institutions to generate and share data on threatened aquatic species, share experiences and best practices as part of learning processes to inform capacity building initiatives and policy review processes that will ensure stronger enforcement of wildlife legislation, and consequent reduction in loss of key threatened biodiversity."

About the organisations:

Abidjan Convention

The Convention for the Cooperation in the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Atlantic Coast of West and Central and Southern African Region (Abidjan Convention) is one of the African regional Seas conventions administered by UNEP.

It is a comprehensive umbrella agreement for the protection and management of the marine and coastal area, and aims to address pollution from ships, dumping, land-based sources, exploration and exploitation of the seabed, and pollution from or through the atmosphere. It also makes provision for liability and compensation in case of pollution

For more information contact: Mr. Abou Bamba, Regional Coordinator, Abidjan Convention/UNEP - Tel: +225 027 18781 - Email: abou.bamba@unep.org.

OceanCare

OceanCare is a Swiss non-profit organisation. It was founded in 1989 and has a strong commitment to realistic and cooperative initiatives. The organisation works at national and international level in the areas of marine pollution, environmental changes, fisheries, whaling, sealing, captivity of marine mammals and public education.

OceanCare holds Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) and is partner of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), and the UNEP/CMS Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans in the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS). OceanCare has also been accredited as a Major Group to the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), which is the governing body of UNEP and is a part of the UNEP Global Partnership on Marine Litter.

WA-BiCC

West Africa Biodiversity and Climate Change (WA BiCC) is a five-year Program (2015-2020) funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) that aims to improve conservation and climate-resilient low-emissions growth across West Africa. Although regional in scope and design, WA BiCC focuses on targeted geographical areas within the region to improve governance and policy over critical natural and human systems. By working through its core regional partners, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Mano River Union (MRU), the Abidjan Convention, as well as national and sub-national institutions, WA BiCC also aims to increase the capacity of institutions at all levels to address the three core WA BiCC components. These are combatting wildlife trafficking, increasing coastal resilience to climate change, and reducing deforestation, forest degradation, and biodiversity loss.

