

cites

GREENPEACE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CITES COP13
CITES, WILDLIFE TRADE AND THE THREAT TO GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY

POSITION STATEMENT 2004

irrawaddy dolphin orcaella brevirostris

PROPOSAL 3

The Government of Thailand has proposed the transfer of the Irrawaddy dolphin (*Orcaella brevirostris*) from Appendix II to Appendix I in response to the increasing threat from the removal of individuals for captive display. The alarmingly low levels of several of these dolphin populations has meant that a number have been officially classified "critically endangered". In order to ensure that international trade does not compromise the continued existence of several populations of the Irrawaddy dolphin, the proposed Appendix I listing must be supported.

GREENPEACE RECOMMENDS: **support proposal 3**



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IRRAWADDY DOLPHIN

ORCAELLA BREVIROSTRIS

PROPOSAL

description

The Irrawaddy dolphin is a freshwater and estuarine species from the Indian and Pacific Oceans, South East Asia and northern Australia. It lives near to the coast and river mouths, and several populations also live upstream in three large rivers: the Mekong, Mahakam and the Ayeyarwady River.

Unfortunately there is little scientific data regarding the number of Irrawaddy dolphin that are still left in the wild. Available research shows that there has been a significant decline in the number of individuals in several areas, and the World Conservation Union (IUCN)

(<http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/IUCN>) has listed several geographically isolated populations on the Red List as "Critically Endangered", which means that they face a high risk of extinction in the near future.

threats

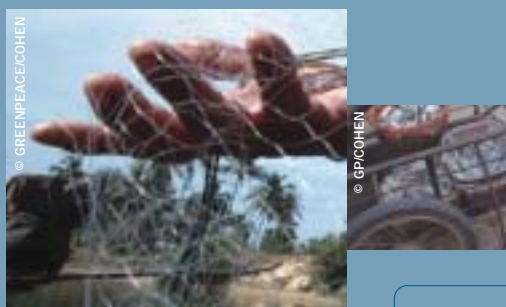
The Irrawaddy is especially vulnerable to a number of human-induced threats due to their restricted and fragmented distribution in deep river pools and coastal areas with substantial freshwater inputs.

entanglement: Gillnet entanglement is one of the major threats facing this dolphin, as well as indiscriminate electric fishing and shark nets set near beaches to protect swimmers.

habitat degradation: Dam construction, channel blasting and increased industrial activities such as logging and gold-mining cause major changes to the Irrawaddy dolphin's natural habitat, increasing pollution and the build-up of silt in rivers. These activities also create noises that could interfere with their ability to navigate, communicate and detect and catch their prey.

overfishing: The decrease in the Irrawaddy's food supply (fish and crustaceans) from over-fishing has probably also had a negative impact on populations.

capture: The demand for captive dolphins in Asia is growing, and the charismatic appearance of Irrawaddy dolphins makes them a particularly attractive choice. Once they enter trade it is almost impossible to differentiate among Irrawaddy dolphins from different populations.



International demand could therefore lead to the illegal capture of animals from critically endangered populations (such as from the Songkhla Lake and the Mekong, Mahakam and Ayeyarwady rivers). The removal of even a small number of individuals places increased pressure on already dwindling populations, with potentially irreversible effects.

support from the iwc

The Scientific Committee of the IWC reviewed the status of the Irrawaddy dolphin in 2000, and recommended that, given the "precarious conservation status" of this species all live captures should stop "until affected populations have been assessed using accepted scientific practices" (IWC, 2001, p.266). More recently in its Report to the IWC meeting in July 2004 (IWC/56/Rec.1 p.47), the Scientific Committee concluded that this proposal to transfer the Irrawaddy dolphin from CITES Appendix II to I was consistent with its 2000 assessment, and it recommended that all direct removals should stop until those vulnerable and affected populations have been scientifically assessed. This Report was adopted by consensus at the meeting.

benefits of appendix I listing

The proposed adjustment in the level of protection is a necessary measure to help protect these rare dolphins. Trade in the live individuals has been difficult to monitor and regulate as most live-capture operations in South East Asia have been poorly regulated and documented. This has made it difficult to identify the source populations of individual Irrawaddy dolphins once they are on display at a facility. Although international trade in live Irrawaddy dolphins is only one of several threats that face this species, it can be effectively addressed through a CITES Appendix I listing which would ban any commercial international trade in specimens of these species.

Although the level of international trade in the Irrawaddy dolphin has been low to date, this species does meet the CITES definition of a species that "is or may be affected by trade" according to CITES Resolution Conf. 9.24 as "there is a potential international demand for specimens", mainly due to the increased growth in dolphinariums in South East Asia. The deliberate removals of these dolphins from small populations should not be allowed as it jeopardises the long-term recovery and survival of these populations.

It has been recognised that a change in the appendix listing of the Irrawaddy dolphin under CITES will not necessarily ensure the survival of the species. However, the listing would allow conservationists to focus their attention on other problems facing this species, such as those posed by fishery bycatch and habitat degradation. This up-listing proposal is seen as a necessary step towards anticipating the problem of the potential international demand for specimens, and to proactively address the issue before it is too late.

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published by greenpeace international
date july 2004
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