



WWF®

SUMMARY

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BUILDING A GLOBAL MOVEMENT TO SECURE THE LONG-TERM FUTURE OF RIVER DOLPHINS, THEIR RIVERS AND THE COMMUNITIES THAT DEPEND ON THEM.

WWF'S RIVER DOLPHIN INITIATIVE

WHY HAVE A RIVER DOLPHIN INITIATIVE?

After the extinction of the Yangtze River dolphin (Baiji), which was last sighted in 2002, there are only five existing species of river dolphins left in the world today, and they are all endangered or critically endangered.

WHAT ARE THE THREATS?

The threats to river dolphins are too massive and varied to be dealt with country-by-country or species-by-species: a global effort is needed and is critical for the survival of the species. The primary focus of the initiative will address those issues that are most immediate and severe, namely:

- Unsustainable fishing and fishing-related activities. In Asia, (illegal) bycatch is the number one cause of river dolphin mortality. In South America, intentional killing of river dolphins for fish bait and meat affects several thousand dolphins per year.
- Infrastructure projects that affect habitat connectivity, including hydropower dams, irrigation barrages and embankments. In Asia, river dolphin habitat has decreased by 50-70% and in South America by 10%. Asia and South America are in the grips of an infrastructure explosion; for example, with hundreds large dams planned in the Amazon, and a potential giant dam in the lower Mekong (Sambor).
- Mining, agriculture and industrial development that degrade water quality. Deteriorating water quality due to agriculture runoff and industrial effluents is a serious threat to dolphins in Asia, while mercury poisoning due to gold mining has been found in dolphins in both Asia and South America.

- There is low public awareness of river dolphins and the critical state they are in, so this initiative will aim to inspire a global awareness movement to secure their future.

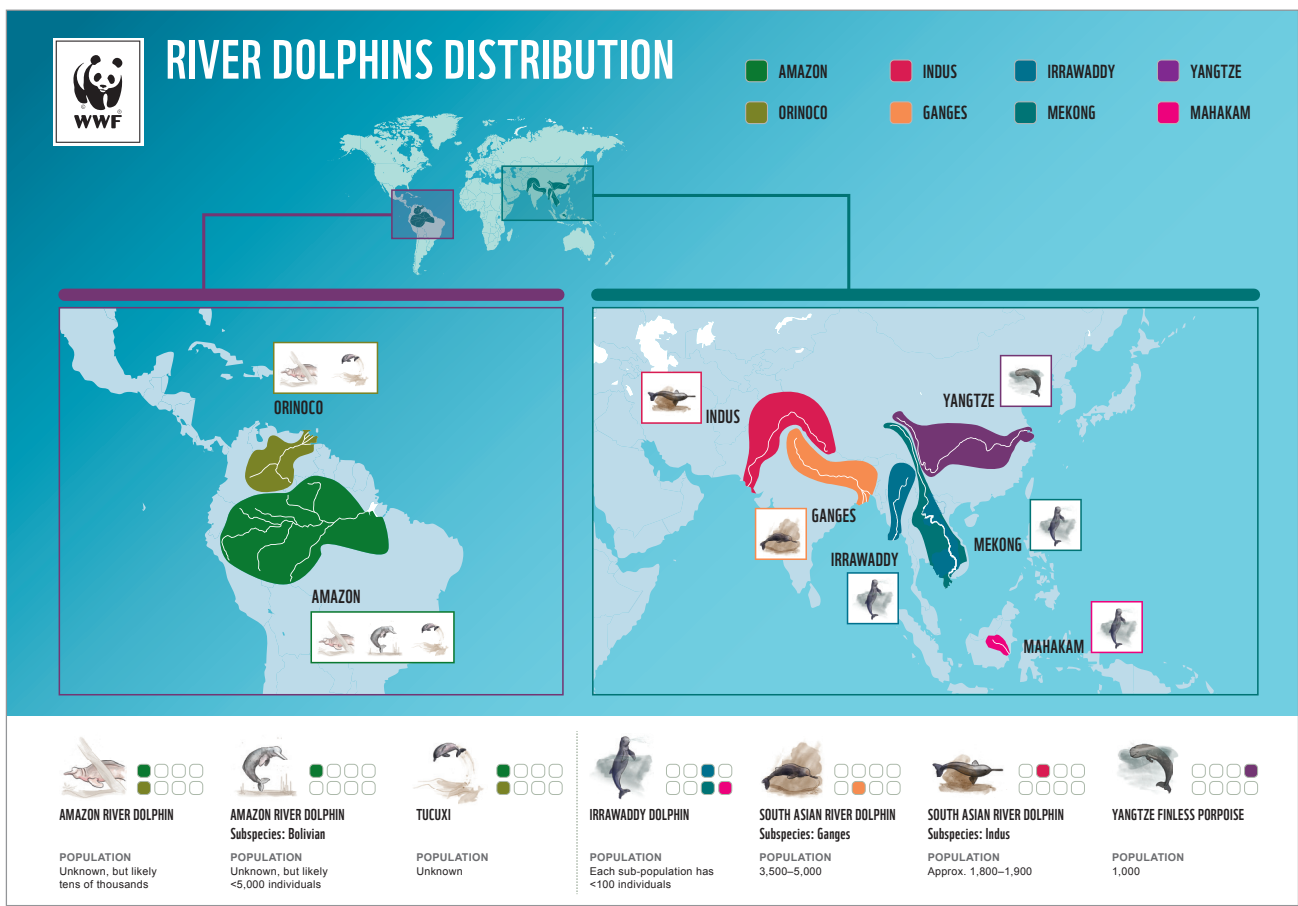
WHAT IS OUR VISION?

by 2030, we will have stopped the decline of river dolphin populations in Asia and South America and will have restored and doubled the most affected populations. The Initiative will unite governments, businesses, communities and other partners in 15 range countries* in a global and coordinated alliance to save river dolphins and their habitats, while improving livelihoods, community participation, ecosystem services, climate resilience and water quality for the benefit of people and nature.

WHAT IS OUR APPROACH?

This 12-year (2019-2030) initiative will be implemented in three phases:

- 2019-2022; build a global multi stakeholder movement and gain political momentum to halt the decline in river dolphin numbers. We aim for a signed Inter-Governmental Declaration by 2021.
- 2023-2026; create more protected and sustainable areas for river dolphins, so there is sufficient range for population increases. WWF aims to improve the management of the 60 existing protected areas and double the total area under protection from 4.5 to 9 million km².
- 2027-2030; ensure governments adopt a leadership role, implement Multilateral Environmental Agreements and secure funds through large-scale multilateral or multi-donor funding.



WHY HAVE A GLOBAL ALLIANCE?


Various platforms and global policy frameworks already exist to support the conservation of river dolphins including: The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) **but we need to do more.**

Global partnerships will be especially important to build political will at the international level, as well as with key national governments. The Initiative will also develop large scale multilateral and multi-donor funded programmes in partnership with governments, to ensure that resources are available to directly support river dolphin conservation and ensure the necessary fisheries policy reforms and system scale river basin planning projects are in place. Where businesses are operating in such a way as to negatively affect dolphin habitat, we will work together with them to ensure their practices conform with national legal requirements and improve their transparency.

Other core partners include IUCN/Cetacean Specialist Group, the International Whaling Commission, Marine Mammal Commission, Omacha Foundation, Mamirauá Institute, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and UNDP.



Above: Indus river dolphin Rescue operation, Left: Irrawaddy dolphins



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