

**Virtual Meeting of the Signatories to the Memorandum of  
Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Dugongs  
(*Dugong dugon*) and their Habitats throughout their Range**

*(Online, 21-22 April 2026)*

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**MEETING REPORT**

*(Prepared by the Secretariat of the Dugong MOU)*

**1. Background**

In April 2026, the Secretariat of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Dugongs (*Dugong dugon*) and their Habitats throughout their Range (Dugong MOU) convened a virtual meeting of the National Focal Points to facilitate exchange on recent developments under the Dugong MOU and to advance preparations for upcoming intergovernmental processes.

Two virtual sessions were held on 21 and 22 April 2026 to accommodate participants across the wide geographic range of the dugong, spanning multiple time zones. The discussions from both sessions have been consolidated into the present report for ease of reference and to ensure a comprehensive record of the exchanges.

The meetings served as an important platform to strengthen communication between the Secretariat and the Signatories, and to support the alignment of national efforts with regional and global priorities. They also helped ensure that forthcoming decisions, particularly those related to preparations for the fourth Meeting of the Signatories (MOS4) and the revision of the Conservation and Management Plan (CMP) of the Dugong MOU, are informed by the experiences of the Signatories.

**2. Welcome Note**

Mr. Abdelmenam Mohamed, Head of the Dugong MOU Secretariat, opened the meetings by welcoming all participants. He introduced the overarching objectives of the meeting as outlined above, and the agenda, which was for the Secretariat to share recent updates and present proposed revisions to the CMP, and for National Focal Points to provide updates on national implementation of the MOU, as well as feedback on the proposed CMP updates.

### **3. Updates from the Dugong MOU**

#### **3.1. 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Signatories (MOS4)**

The previous Meeting of the Signatories (MOS3) was held in 2017. MOS4 was initially planned for 2024, following disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia had expressed interest in hosting the meeting. In light of the postponement of that meeting, and given the current situation in West Asia, alternative hosting arrangements may be considered. The Secretariat will therefore circulate an official invitation to all Signatories via email, inviting expressions of interest in hosting MOS4.

Mr. Mansoor enquired about the requirements for the host country. Mr. Mohamed responded that there are no strict requirements, and that contributions may be discussed in terms of logistics, travel and transportation, hospitality, or financial support. He further noted that, in accordance with the Rules of Procedure, Signatories must be notified of the date of the meeting at least six months in advance.

Additionally, a call for voluntary contributions has been circulated to all Signatories. These contributions will primarily support the implementation of the outcomes of MOS4, and the consideration of Signatories is encouraged.

#### **3.2. Regional Dialogues**

Three regional dialogues on seagrass conservation within the dugong range were convened in 2025, providing an opportunity to share knowledge and build momentum on this issue:

- Asian Dialogue on Seagrass and Dugong Conservation (Bangkok, Thailand; ten countries represented)
- Arabian Peninsula Dialogue (Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates; eight countries represented, along with international experts; report forthcoming)
- West Indian Ocean Dialogue (Mombasa, Kenya; five countries represented)

Further efforts are planned to expand these regional workshops to additional regions and to replicate this model.

The outcomes of the three dialogues were presented at a side event during CMS COP15 in Brazil in March 2026. Ms. Montgomery asked whether materials from the side event could be circulated, and Mr. Mohamed confirmed that they could. A report of the event will be shared in due course.

#### **3.3. ROPME Agreement**

The Secretariat has signed a new agreement with the Regional Organization for the Protection of Marine Environment (ROPME), based in Kuwait, to undertake a baseline study aimed at identifying knowledge gaps and key challenges relating to dugongs, turtles, and sharks and rays under the related CMS instruments: Dugong MOU, IOSEA Marine Turtles MOU, and Sharks

MOU. This initiative represents an important development, and the relevant countries will be informed in due course.

This is a unique effort, marking the first time that three CMS instruments are being implemented jointly within a single region, covering eight countries. There is an intention to replicate this model in other regions, such as the Red Sea, as well as to explore its application in additional regions, including the Pacific and Africa, where appropriate.

#### 3.4. 2030 Seagrass Breakthrough

The Secretariat is currently in discussions with UNEP Headquarters regarding the financial mechanism for the initiative. It is anticipated that, once the situation stabilizes in the region, an event can be held with all relevant stakeholders to consider the next steps and determine the way forward.

#### 3.5. Infographic on Dugong Global Conservation

Ms. Munshi is developing an infographic to showcase global conservation reserves dedicated specifically to dugongs. She presented her work during the second meeting (22 April), and participants' feedback was collected to further refine the draft.

Discussions focused on clarifying the definition and purpose of a 'dugong reserve' for this exercise, including whether such reserves are legally binding, fully protected, or exclusively designated for dugongs.

It was suggested to produce two separate infographics: one highlighting reserves specifically designated for dugongs, and another covering broader reserves that include dugongs but are not primarily focused on them.

Participants also discussed the potential development of a list of important dugong sites under the Dugong MOU. Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs), developed by IUCN with dugongs as a primary focus, are already identified and presented in the Dugong Global Status Report, and in the [IMMAs searchable database](#).

### **4. Conservation and Management Plan**

Following the launch of the Dugong Global Status Report at the IUCN Congress in 2025, discussions were held with Ms. Marsh on updating the Conservation Management Plan (CMP). The proposed revisions draw on the report's Executive Summary and Chapter 11, with the aim of aligning the CMP as closely as possible with its findings.

An updated version of the CMP, with proposed revisions highlighted in red, was circulated to participants in advance of the meetings for their consideration. The modifications were presented by Ms. Caron-Strehlow and subsequently discussed with participants, whose feedback was collected by the Secretariat.

Mr. Torres-Florez and Mr. Al Qahtani asked whether the CMP could be structured by dugong population rather than for the species as a whole, to better reflect regional contexts, including specific threats and opportunities. Mr. Mohamed responded that a regional approach is planned to be incorporated, covering the Western Indian Ocean (WIO), the Arabian Peninsula, Southeast Asia (SEA), and Australasia.

Mr. Torres-Florez suggested that it may be relevant to include a section in the CMP addressing the ongoing conflict in the Gulf and its potential impacts on dugongs. He noted that this should be taken into consideration under Objective 1, and that any available data should be shared.

Ms. Montgomery proposed including a timeline in the CMP, that could reflect countries' available resources (human, financial, etc.) and national context, combined with the prioritization of actions.

Comments from participants will be incorporated by the Secretariat into a revised version of the CMP. This updated draft will then be circulated to all Dugong MOU National Focal Points for review and the provision of written feedback.

In addition, the Secretariat will share an Excel version of the CMP alongside the updated Word document. Signatories will be invited to prioritize activities at the regional level, indicate timelines based on national contexts and available resources, and provide examples of existing initiatives that address the listed actions and activities. This exercise aims to support the regional adaptation of the CMP, ensure thorough preparation for MOS, and facilitate informed decision-making.

Ms. Armstrong recommended adding a "not applicable" option for the prioritization of activities in the Excel version of the CMP, recognizing that not all activities are relevant to every country within the dugong's range.

## **5. National Updates** (in alphabetical order of the countries)

### Australia

Ms. Armstrong delivered Australia's national update via a PowerPoint presentation, summarized as follows.

Direct take of dugongs is prohibited in Australia, with the exception of traditional use under established cultural and legal frameworks. The country is considered a global stronghold for dugongs and a key contributor to their conservation worldwide. Management is shared across the Commonwealth, states, and territories, with strong engagement from First Nations communities. Aerial surveys have been conducted approximately every five years since the 1980s, forming a long-term monitoring dataset.

Key management actions include strengthening partnerships with Indigenous ranger programmes, conducting national aerial surveys of dugongs (ideally at 5-year intervals), and mapping seagrass habitats. There is also ongoing work to explore how artificial intelligence could support aerial survey analysis, as well as additional work to understand connectivity and relatedness of dugong populations through genetic studies.

Australia is currently updating its Biologically Important Areas that identify reproduction, feeding, migration and resting areas, including for dugong and other protected marine species. Stakeholders can nominate “areas of interest”, supported by relevant data, which are then reviewed by an expert panel for each species. Biologically Important Areas are also publicly available through a dedicated website and are a decision support tool in a regulatory context.

Additional measures include a national plan to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, as well as actions addressing the impacts of marine debris on marine ecosystems.

### Bahrain

A project aiming to strengthen the role of local organizations in seagrass conservation while also focusing on key dugong aggregation sites is ongoing. It includes assessing the impacts of fishing activities on dugongs, with particular attention to ensuring that small-scale fisheries do not adversely affect dugong populations. A strong emphasis is placed on community participation, including research on how to empower local fishing communities to monitor and mitigate impacts on dugongs. As part of this work, conservation guidelines for dugongs and seagrass meadows in the area have been developed.

In terms of policy and marine protection, two islands have been designated as marine protected areas (MPAs), with their surrounding waters legally protected and recognized as important dugong habitats. In addition, an artificial island has recorded dugong sightings and is considered part of a broader aggregation area. Monitoring programmes have also been established to track dugong mortality, including the development of a dedicated database. The country joined the CMS in 2022.

A separate study focusing on carbon sequestration in seagrass meadows is currently underway and is expected to be published soon. Mr. Mohamed encouraged that this study be shared with the Secretariat once available. He also expressed particular interest in the dugong mortality monitoring programme and its database, noting that it could serve as a valuable model for other regions and countries, and indicated that further information may be requested in due course.

### France

In Mayotte and New Caledonia, action plans for dugong conservation are in place, though their contexts differ significantly.

In Mayotte, the dugong population is extremely small, estimated at eight to ten individuals, including two breeding females. Reproduction occurs infrequently but is still ongoing. Pressures on the population persist; while poaching is rare, it does occur. There is also evidence of movement between Mayotte and Madagascar. The current Action Plan (2021–2025) is

considered inappropriate for the size of the population. Mayotte will present its plan to the National Advisory Council responsible for reviewing and assessing such strategies.

In New Caledonia, dugongs benefit from specific local legislation, reflecting the territory's autonomy in environmental matters, even though the species is also protected under French law. Awareness campaigns have been conducted by the New Caledonia Biodiversity Agency to address poaching. Work under the Action Plan is ongoing, including research into the cultural use of dugongs. An aerial survey campaign is planned for June 2026, led by the WWF, following the previous survey conducted in 2018. The dugong population in New Caledonia is currently estimated at around 400 individuals.

A request was made to the CMS Secretariat to give greater visibility to two studies conducted in New Caledonia on dugongs, as no response had been received, Mr. Expert is submitting this again, to which Mr. Mohamed responded positively.

Finally, it was noted that France is currently facing budgetary constraints and is therefore unable to commit to voluntary contributions at this stage.

### Myanmar

No major update was reported. The most recent surveys were conducted in 2020, identifying two key habitats in coastal areas: one in the southern coastal archipelago and another along the northern coast of Myanmar, with a higher population observed in the northern region. Information on strandings and bycatch is primarily concentrated along the northern coast. A report published in 2018 also addressed strandings and bycatch in the area. There is an urgent need for additional surveys to better understand population trends and dynamics over time.

### Philippines

Efforts have been ongoing over the past two years to mobilize resources for dugong conservation. Field officers have now begun implementing activities on the ground, including updating national dugong distribution records. This work has led to the identification of new areas where dugongs occur, as well as the recognition of previously undocumented strongholds. Recent monitoring has recorded six individuals, compared to three in earlier surveys.

Monitoring is being conducted using drone-based surveys and standardized methodologies, with the aim of developing national guidelines for the identification and designation of critical dugong habitats. These guidelines are intended to expand concepts traditionally used for terrestrial species sites and are expected to be completed by the end of 2026, at which point results would be presented.

With additional funding, support has also been secured from an NGO to design modifications to fishing gear that currently results in turtle and dugong bycatch. The outcomes of this work are still pending but are expected to be highly valuable in areas with elevated bycatch risk. The Secretariat may facilitate the final review of the guidelines through the Dugong MOU TAG.

Ms. Marsh emphasized the importance of advancing seagrass mapping, noting that designing appropriate survey approaches remains challenging. She also highlighted recent progress in taxonomy and conservation status assessments, including the acceptance of a Chinese subpopulation of dugongs being listed as Critically Endangered by IUCN, which helps improve recognition and conservation attention.

She stressed that the ability to update assessments is critical, particularly as many of the most important populations are found on isolated islands, such as Seychelles and Palau.

A PhD research project at James Cook University is currently studying dugong genetics using genomic approaches. However, challenges remain in obtaining CITES permits for sample export, and there is a growing interest among countries in developing in-house expertise. It was noted that costs could be reduced if key genomic regions of interest were better identified in advance. In East Africa, collaboration remains difficult, and it was suggested that the Dugong MOU could support the development of a technical report on genetics to guide national and regional work. This could help streamline efforts and facilitate more effective collaboration across countries.

### Saudi Arabia

Surveys on marine megafauna, including dugongs, are currently being conducted as part of broader national efforts in Saudi Arabia. An action plan for megafauna is under development, which also includes dugongs and is intended to support the CMP of the Dugong MOU.

Key priorities include the prevention of bycatch, with a questionnaire planned for the following week to assess the impact of bycatch on dugongs and other megafauna species. Marine mammal monitoring surveys are also set to begin, starting in the Red Sea, where three marine protected areas are located, before expanding to the Gulf region.

There is a strong interest in coordinating survey timing and methodologies with other countries conducting similar work, in order to improve data comparability across the Gulf. Mr. Mohamed noted that this approach aligns closely with activities under the ROPME Agreement. He indicated that a meeting will be convened with the eight Gulf countries to discuss joint monitoring initiatives and related activities, emphasizing that this framework represents the most suitable platform for advancing coordinated efforts.

### Seychelles

Current work includes exploring the use of drone surveys in atoll areas, as well as investigating AI-based models to assist in identifying dugongs for improved population estimates. An increase in dugong numbers is expected, although it was noted that the learning curve for these methods is steep. Efforts are ongoing to refine and improve population estimation techniques. More efficient and less intrusive tagging methods would be welcome, as the connectivity of dugong populations in Seychelles and the wider region is not yet fully understood. While the population is currently believed to be resident, further studies are needed to confirm this.

In terms of spatial protection, the designated area has been expanded from 300 km<sup>2</sup> to 2,556 km<sup>2</sup>, with the no-take zone also significantly enlarged, reflecting important progress in conservation measures.

### United Arab Emirates

Monitoring efforts are continuing under the existing marine megafauna monitoring programme. However, fieldwork related to seagrass has been delayed due to the current context in the region.

A pilot study on a seagrass restoration programme has been completed, and work is now being aligned with the 2030 Strategic Biodiversity Framework targets. It was noted that stronger recognition of seagrass protection would be beneficial for countries, particularly through reducing existing pressures on these ecosystems.

It was further emphasized that seagrass restoration is generally not cost-effective, and that greater emphasis should therefore be placed on conservation rather than restoration. Improving the cost-effectiveness of conservation measures was highlighted as an important consideration. The importance of holding MOS4 was also reiterated.

## **6. Action Points**

- The Secretariat will circulate the report of the COP15 side event.
- The Secretariat will send an official invitation to Signatories via email, inviting expressions of interest in hosting MOS4.
- The Secretariat will circulate the updated CMP in Word format to collect further inputs from Signatories.
- The Secretariat will also circulate the updated CMP in Excel format for Signatories to complete, including information on geographical scope, prioritization and timelines of actions, and examples of existing initiatives addressing the listed activities.
- The Secretariat will provide additional information and invoices, as needed, regarding voluntary contributions (including to Bahrain, as requested during the meeting).
- The Secretariat will organize a meeting of the TAG in the coming months.
- Mr. Expert will share with the Secretariat a request from colleagues in New Caledonia to disseminate new materials via its communication channels.

**ANNEX 1  
ALPHABETICAL LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

**National Focal Points**

Australia	<b>Narelle Montgomery</b>	<b>National Focal Point</b> Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment
Bahrain	<b>Ali Mansoor Abbas</b>	<b>National Focal Point</b> Supreme Council for Environment
France	<b>Florian Expert</b>	<b>National Focal Point</b> Ministry of Environment, Energy and Sea
Myanmar	<b>Han Win</b>	<b>National Focal Point</b> Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation
Saudi Arabia	<b>Tareq Hussain Al Qahtani</b>	<b>National Focal Point</b> National Center for Wildlife
Seychelles	<b>Frauke Fleischer-Dogley</b>	<b>National Focal Point</b> Seychelles Island Foundation

**Experts**

<b>Helene Marsh</b>	<b>Emeritus Professor, Environmental Science</b> James Cook University Australia
<b>Himansu Sekhar Das</b>	<b>Expert Marine Biodiversity Assessment and Conservation Terrestrial and Marine Biodiversity</b> Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi United Arab Emirates
<b>Husain Ali Mohamed</b>	<b>Environmental Officer</b> Supreme Council for Environment Bahrain
<b>Jessica Armstrong</b>	<b>Assistant Director</b> Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment Australia
<b>Juan Pablo Torres-Florez</b>	<b>Senior Environmental Consultant, marine mammals</b> National Center for Wildlife Saudi Arabia

<b>Rizza Salinas</b>	<b>Veterinarian</b> Biodiversity Management Bureau Philippines
<b>Sara Kophamel</b>	<b>Senior Policy Officer</b> Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment Australia

## Convention on Migratory Species

<b>Aaliyah Munshi</b>	<b>Programme Support Intern</b> CMS Office - Abu Dhabi United Arab Emirates
<b>Abdelmenam Mohamed</b>	<b>Programme Management Officer (Dugong MOU)</b> CMS Office - Abu Dhabi United Arab Emirates
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<b>Clémentine Grillo</b>	<b>Programme Support Intern</b> CMS Office - Abu Dhabi United Arab Emirates