



CMS COP15 Dugong MOU Side Event Flyer © CMS Dugong MOU

#### EVENT AT A GLANCE

- **Date:** 23 March 2026
- **Organizer:** CMS Dugong MOU
- **Focus:** Regional cooperation for seagrass and dugong conservation
- **Format:** Opening remarks; three regional presentations; panel discussion

#### MAIN MESSAGE

Seagrass conservation is central to dugong recovery. Across all regions, speakers highlighted the need for better mapping, stronger monitoring, clearer policy recognition, and sustainable financing to support long-term protection of these critical habitats.

#### RECAP

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) Dugong Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) convened a side event during the 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Conference of Parties to CMS (CMS COP15), bringing together regional experiences from Asia, the Arabian Gulf, and the Western Indian Ocean. The discussion explored how governments, researchers, and conservation partners can strengthen collaboration to advance seagrass and dugong conservation across the species' range.

The session built on a series of recent regional dialogues and workshops, including the Asian regional exchange supported through the International Climate Initiative (IKI) Seagrass Ecosystem Services Project. It provided an opportunity to compare experiences across regions, share emerging lessons and identify practical pathways for deeper cooperation.

#### OPENING REMARKS —INKA GNITTKE, GERMANY / IKI

Germany's representative, Inka Gnittke, opened the event on behalf of the International Climate Initiative (IKI). She highlighted Germany's continued support for ecosystem-based conservation and restoration, including through the IKI funded Seagrass Ecosystem Services Project.

Implemented under the CMS Dugong MOU, the IKI SES Project has supported seagrass conservation efforts across Southeast Asia, particularly in India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Timor-Leste. The initiative has helped improve understanding of the multiple values of seagrass ecosystems, including their contributions to carbon storage, fisheries productivity, coastal protection, and local livelihoods.

Her opening remarks also linked the Southeast Asian experience to the broader regional discussions featured during the event. In particular, the Asian Regional Dialogue on Seagrass and Dugong Conservation, held in Thailand, helped inspire regional exchanges in the Arabian Gulf and Western Indian Ocean.



Opening remarks by Inka Gnittke, on behalf of Germany's International Climate Initiative (IKI). © CMS Dugong MOU

# CMS COP15 Dugong MOU Side Event Summary

## REGIONAL PRESENTATIONS

### Asian region

**Maresh Pradhan** —  
Coordinator, Coordinating  
Body on the Seas of East  
Asia (COBSEA)



Presenting outcomes from the Special Session for the Asian Region, held in Bangkok on 20–21 February 2025 and attended by more than 100 participants, Maresh Pradhan explained that discussions were organised around three core themes: policy, data, and management. Key priorities identified during the session included stronger regional coordination, improved data sharing, harmonized monitoring methodologies, expanded capacity building, and more sustainable financing mechanisms to support long-term conservation efforts.

### Arabian region

**Hung Meng Nguyen** —  
Senior Researcher, Yas  
SeaWorld Research and  
Rescue Centre, Abu Dhabi



Reporting from the First Arabian Regional Scientific Seagrass Workshop, held in Abu Dhabi on 30 April–1 May 2025 and attended by approximately 100 experts, Hung Meng Nguyen noted that the Arabian Gulf contains an estimated 6% of the world's seagrass ecosystems, despite incomplete and outdated regional mapping. The presentation highlighted priorities including further research on blue carbon and ecosystem services, stronger policy recognition for seagrass ecosystems, enhanced regional data sharing, technical training, restoration initiatives, and sustainable long-term funding.

### Western Indian Ocean

**Asma Awadh** — WWF  
Kenya; Dugong MOU  
Technical Advisory  
Committee



Drawing on discussions from the Special Dugong and Seagrass Session at the 13th Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA) Symposium in September 2025, Asma Awadh described how dugong populations across the Western Indian Ocean remain small and fragmented and have recently been reclassified as Critically Endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List. Recommendations emerging from the session included development of a regional “30 by 30” roadmap, inventories of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECMs), improved regional monitoring and data systems, greater technical capacity support, and dedicated financing for seagrass conservation.

## PANEL DISCUSSION

### Saudi Arabia — Eman Sabbagh, National Center for Wildlife (NCW)

Responding to a question on lessons from Saudi Arabia that could help strengthen seagrass conservation and regional collaboration in the Arabian region, Eman Sabbagh emphasised that protection measures must take priority before restoration efforts are undertaken. She noted that many seagrass habitats continue to face pressures from dredging, declining water quality, unplanned coastal development, and repeated disturbance. She also highlighted the importance of establishing strong scientific baselines, including improved seagrass mapping, species and habitat condition assessments, and better integration of seagrass data into marine and coastal planning processes.

### Somalia — Abdirashid Artan Abdirahman, Director of Biodiversity, Wildlife and Forestry, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change; CMS National Focal Point

Discussing opportunities to strengthen research and regional cooperation across the Western Indian Ocean, Abdirashid Artan Abdirahman identified Marine Spatial Planning as a practical framework for balancing marine resource use with conservation objectives. He also pointed to opportunities for joint seagrass mapping initiatives, coordinated dugong research, improved regional data sharing, and the development of harmonized monitoring methodologies across countries the region.

### Sri Lanka — Suhada Jayawardana, Department of Wildlife Conservation

Suhada Jayawardana highlighted Sri Lanka's leadership in advancing World Seagrass Day, noting that the country's experience shows the importance of linking global advocacy with national action. Sri Lanka is strengthening seagrass conservation through blue carbon assessment, species research, restoration, and protection of key dugong and seagrass habitats, offering useful lessons for stronger policy action and regional collaboration across Asia.

## About CMS

The Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), also known as the Bonn Convention, is an environmental treaty of the United Nations that provides a global platform for the conservation and sustainable use of terrestrial, aquatic and avian migratory animals and their habitats.

## CMS Instruments

Animals receive protection under CMS through listing on its two Appendices, through global or regional agreements and through action plans. The Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Dugongs and their Habitats (Dugong MOU) is the CMS instrument devoted to the conservation of this group of species.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Regional dialogues across Asia, the Arabian Gulf, and the Western Indian Ocean have helped build a shared vision for dugong and seagrass conservation. The next step is to strengthen coordination and turn this momentum into sustained action through the CMS Dugong MOU.

## SHARED PRIORITIES & NEXT STEPS

- Improve seagrass mapping, monitoring and ecosystem assessments
- Strengthen regional data sharing and scientific collaboration
- Develop harmonized monitoring methods and ecosystem health indicators
- Integrate seagrass more clearly in policy, coastal management, and marine spatial planning
- Expand technical training, knowledge exchange, and capacity building
- Develop sustainable financing mechanisms for long term conservation action
- Utilize national, regional, and international platforms and instruments—such as the CMS Dugong MOU—to strengthen coordination of seagrass and marine conservation initiatives, including the 2030 Seagrass Breakthrough.

## Contact



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