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Dolphins in Pearl River Estuary

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Why in News

According to a recent report, **Chinese pink dolphins** are making a comeback in the **Pearl River Estuary (PRE)**.

Indo-Pacific humpback dolphins are also known as **Chinese white dolphins** or **pink dolphins**, reflecting the colour of their skin.

Key Points

Pearl River Estuary:

- It includes **Hong Kong, Macau as well as the mainland Chinese cities** of Shenzhen, Guangzhou and Dongguan. Around 22 million people live in the area.
- The **Pearl River Delta**, the low-lying area surrounding the PRE where the Pearl River flows into the **South China Sea**, is one of the world's **most densely urbanised, heavily industrialised and busiest shipping lanes** on Earth.



- **Current Scenario and Reasons Behind:**

- Dolphins use **echolocation** to find their way in the water and the ships often disturb them in finding their way and even kill them.
 - **Echolocation** is a technique used by bats, dolphins and other animals to **determine the location of objects using reflected sound.**
 - This allows the animals to move around in pitch darkness, so they can navigate, hunt, identify friends and enemies, and avoid obstacles.
- However, dolphin numbers in the waters between Hong Kong and Macau have seen a rebound in 2020 because **Covid-19 pandemic** has **stopped ferries and hence reduced their traffic.**
- The number of pink dolphins in the waters has **roughly increased by a third** according to scientists.

- **Indo-Pacific Humpback Dolphin:**



- **Scientific Name:** *Sousa Chinensis*.
- **Habitat Range:**
 - Its total range is in coastal waters **from central China southward throughout Southeast Asia and westward to the Bay of Bengal**, with highest densities in and around estuaries.
 - The distribution is **fragmented** such that these dolphins are apparently **absent from fairly long stretches of coastline**. It is not always clear whether the fragmentation is ‘natural’ or caused by human activities.
- The **World Wildlife Fund for Nature** (WWF) says the population in the PRE is believed to be around 2,500, but falling numbers of young could reduce numbers in future.
- They have **seen a decline in their numbers in the past 15 years by 70-80%**.
- **Threats:**
 - Agricultural, industrial, and urban pollution.
 - Overfishing.
 - Marine construction including bridge-building and land creation for airport expansion and residential/office development.
 - Transport including fast ferries.
 - Selling into captivity at marine “entertainment” parks and aquariums worldwide.
- **Effects:**

Loss of suitable habitat, the mortality of dolphins from entanglements and vessel strikes, and the possible effects of chemical, sewage and noise pollution on their health.
- **Conservation:**

IUCN Status: **Vulnerable**.

Source: DTE