



Global Declaration for River Dolphins

[Source: WWF](#)

Why in News?

Recently, **11 Asian and South American** countries signed a landmark deal in Bogota, Colombia to save the world's **six surviving species of river dolphins** from extinction.

- This landmark deal signifies a ray of hope in combating the severe decline of river dolphin populations, which have dwindled by a staggering **73% since the 1980s**.

What is the Global Declaration for River Dolphins?

▪ About:

- The **Global Declaration for River Dolphins** aims to halt the **decline of all river dolphin species** and bolster the most vulnerable populations through concerted efforts.
 - It outlines measures such as **eradicating gillnets, reducing pollution, expanding research initiatives**, and creating protected areas to safeguard the remaining river dolphin species.
- Countries that adopted the declaration include: Bangladesh, Bolivia, Brazil, Cambodia, Colombia, Ecuador, **India**, Nepal, Pakistan, Peru, and Venezuela.
 - There was also a representative from the regional government in Indonesia that has responsibility for the **Mahakam river**.

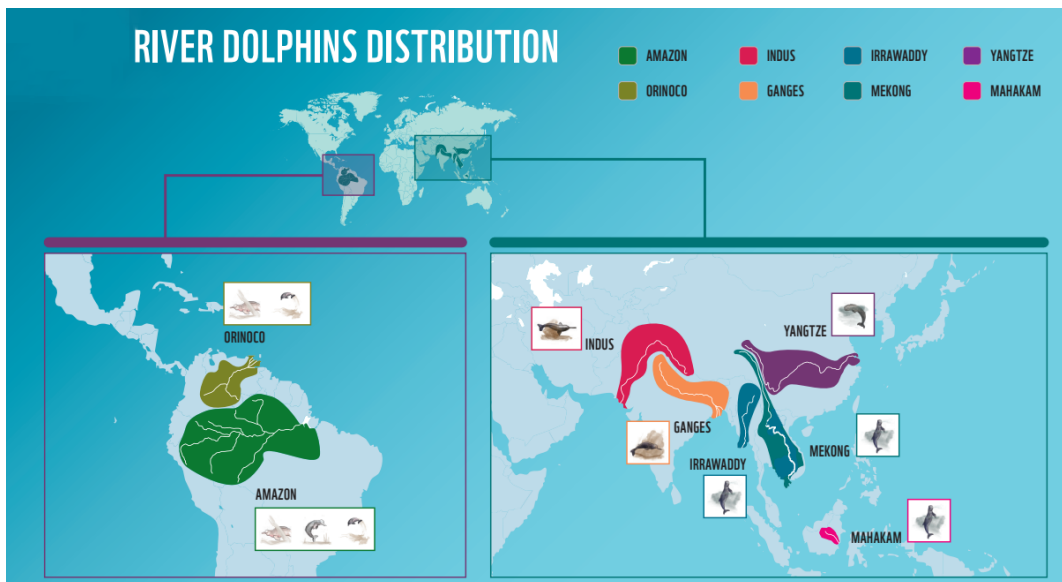
▪ Foundational Pillars:

- The **eight foundational pillars** of the Global Declaration for River Dolphins comprise initiatives like **establishing a network of protected areas, improving river dolphin site management, expanding research and monitoring efforts**, engaging local communities and Indigenous Peoples, eradicating unsustainable fishing practices, enhancing water quality and quantity, promoting **World River Dolphin Day (24th October)** to raise awareness, and augment resource allocation and partnerships.

What are the Key Facts Associated with River Dolphins?

▪ About:

- River dolphins are a group of **freshwater cetaceans** that inhabit various river systems across Asia and South America.
- The **Six Surviving River Dolphin Species** include: **Amazon, Ganges, Indus, Irrawaddy, Tucuxi, and the Yangtze finless porpoise**.
 - The Chinese river dolphin was deemed '**probably extinct**' in **2007**.
- As per the [IUCN Red list](#), **Yangtze finless porpoise** are classified as **Critically Endangered**.
 - **Amazon, Ganges, Indus, Irrawaddy and Tucuxi** are labeled as Endangered.



Note

The Yangtze finless porpoise is the **world's only freshwater porpoise** but it is included with the **other freshwater cetaceans** under the umbrella name 'river dolphins'.

- The [Amazon river dolphin](#), also known as the **pink river dolphin** or **boto** is the largest river dolphin.

- **Challenges Faced by River Dolphins:**
 - River dolphins are threatened by diverse factors, including **unsustainable fishing practices**, **hydropower dam construction**, **pollution from various industries**, agriculture, and mining, as well as habitat loss.
 - Also, the recent tragic deaths of **over 150 river dolphins in the drought-stricken Lake Tefe in the Amazon** illustrate how climate change poses an increasingly severe threat to their survival.

- **Successful Conservation Efforts:**
 - Conservation efforts in populated river basins like the **Indus and Yangtze have seen success.**
 - For instance, the **Indus river dolphin population in Pakistan** doubled due to joint stakeholder action.
 - Additionally, the **Yangtze finless porpoises** witnessed a **23% increase in numbers owing to protective measures.**
 - Moreover, the World Wildlife Fund's **electronic pinger project** saved **80 dolphins in Indonesia's Mahakam river** from gill net entanglement.

GANGES RIVER DOLPHIN

(*Platanista gangetica gangetica*)

National aquatic animal of India

Facts

- Can only live in freshwater; prefer deep water
- Essentially blind; hunts by emitting ultrasonic sound
- Can't breathe in water; must surface every 30-120 seconds for air
- Also called 'susu' because of sound they make while breathing

Habitat & Distribution

- Distributed in Ganges and Brahmaputra River basins of India, Nepal and Bangladesh.
- Distribution range in India covers 7 states namely, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal.

Protection Status

- IUCN Red List:** Endangered
- CITES:** Appendix I
- Wildlife Protection Act 1972:** Schedule I

Threats

- Habitat destruction
- Pollution
- Bycatch
- Climate Change
- Hunting

Conservation Efforts

- Project Dolphin (2021):** On lines of project Tiger
- National Dolphin Research Centre (2021):** India's and Asia's First; in Patna University (Bihar)
- Dedicated Dolphin Sanctuary:**
 - Vikramshila sanctuary (Bihar) – 1991
 - Hastinapur sanctuary (UP) – Proposed



UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question

Q. Which one of the following is the national aquatic animal of India? (2015)

- (a) Saltwater crocodile
- (b) Olive ridley turtle
- (c) Gangetic dolphin
- (d) Gharial

Ans: (c)

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