



Project Dolphin

Why in News

The Prime Minister announced the **government's plan to launch a Project Dolphin** in his recent Independence Day Speech (15th August 2020).

- The proposed project is aimed at **saving both river and marine dolphins.**

Key Points

PROJECT DOLPHIN
PRESERVING OUR UNDERWATER FRIENDS

10-YEAR PROJECT TO FOCUS ON BOTH RIVER AND SEA DOLPHINS

AIM TO STRENGTHEN BIODIVERSITY, CREATE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND ATTRACT TOURISM

KILLING, HABITAT FRAGMENTATION BY DAMS AND BARRAGES AND INDISCRIMINATE FISHING HAS REDUCED THE GANGES RIVER DOLPHIN POPULATION FROM TENS OF THOUSANDS TO AROUND 3,700 OVER THE LAST CENTURY

GANGES RIVER DOLPHIN, A SPECIES OF FRESHWATER DOLPHINS, IS PRIMARILY FOUND IN GANGA AND BRAHMAPUTRA RIVERS, AND THEIR TRIBUTARIES IN INDIA, BANGLADESH AND NEPAL

IN INDIA, THESE DOLPHINS ARE SIGHTED IN DEEP RIVERS IN ASSAM, BIHAR, JHARKHAND, MADHYA PRADESH, RAJASTHAN, UTTAR PRADESH AND WEST BENGAL

GANGES RIVER DOLPHIN, OFFICIALLY DISCOVERED IN 1801, CAN LIVE ONLY IN FRESHWATER

- Project Dolphin will be **on the lines of [Project Tiger](#)**, which has helped increase the tiger population.
- Project **got in-principle approval** in December 2019, at the first meeting of the [National Ganga Council \(NGC\)](#), headed by the Prime Minister.
- It is expected to be implemented by the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate**

Change.

- Special Conservation program needs to be taken up for Gangetic Dolphin which is a **national aquatic animal** and also **indicator species** for the river Ganga spread over several states. As the Gangetic dolphin is at the top of the food chain, protecting the species and its habitat will ensure conservation of aquatic lives of the river.
- So far, the [National Mission for Clean Ganga \(NMCG\)](#), which implements the government's flagship scheme **Namami Gange**, has been taking some initiatives for saving dolphins.
- **Global Experience:** The **Rhine Action Plan (1987)** of the **International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (ICPR)** — representing **Switzerland, France, Germany, Luxemburg and the Netherlands** — helped in conservation of the **salmon** fish (also an indicator species).



Gangetic Dolphin

- **Scientific Name:** Platanista gangetica
- **Features:**
 - These are generally **blind** and catch their prey in a unique manner. They emit an **ultrasonic sound** which reaches the prey.
 - These are also called susu.
- **Location:**
 - It is found **mainly in the Indian subcontinent**, particularly in **Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna** and **Karnaphuli-Sangu** river systems.
 - It is **also** found in the [Ganga's tributaries](#).
- **Threats:**
 - **Dams** disturb the migration, breeding cycles and **habitat** of fish and other prey.
 - **Pollution.**
 - Excessive silting and sand mining especially in Assam and lower course of the Ganga.
- **Population:**
 - [The Gangetic dolphin census](#) suggests that the Gangetic dolphin population in India could be about **2,500-3,000**.
 - As per Ministry of State for Environment, Forest and Climate Change there are about **1,272 dolphins in Uttar Pradesh** and **962 in Assam**.
- **Status of Conservation:**
 - In the **First Schedule of the Indian [Wildlife \(Protection\) Act 1972](#)**.
 - **Endangered** by the [International Union for the Conservation of Nature \(IUCN\)](#).
 - **Appendix I** (most endangered) of the [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species \(CITES\)](#).
 - **Appendix II** (migratory species that need conservation and management or would significantly benefit from international co-operation) of the [Convention on Migratory Species \(CMS\)](#).
- **Conservation Efforts:**

- **Wildlife Protection Act:** In 1986 after the launch of Ganga Action Plan in 1985, the government included Gangetic dolphins in the **First Schedule of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972**.
 - It means they have the highest degree of protection against hunting.
 - This was aimed at checking hunting and providing conservation facilities such as wildlife sanctuaries.
 - For instance, **Vikramshila Ganges Dolphin Sanctuary** was established in Bihar under this Act.
- **Conservation Plan:** The Conservation Action Plan for the Ganges River Dolphin 2010-2020, which “identified threats to Gangetic Dolphins and impact of river traffic, irrigation canals and depletion of prey-base on Dolphins populations”.
 - The **National Ganga River Basin Authority** (replaced by National Ganga Council) in 2009 and constituted a Working Group under the Patna University to prepare a Conservation Action Plan for the Gangetic Dolphin in 2009.
- **National Aquatic Animal:** In 2009, during the 1st meeting of the National Ganga River Basin Authority, the Gangetic river dolphin was declared as the national aquatic animal.
- The National Mission for Clean Ganga celebrates **5th October as National Ganga River Dolphin Day**.

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