

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS
LOK SABHA**

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:3274
ANSWERED ON:18.03.2013
PROTECTION OF SEA COWS
Ray Shri Saugata

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the Government has conducted any thorough study on the reports that the large Marine Mammals, nicknamed Sea Cows are rapidly disappearing from the coasts of Andaman and Gujarat;
- (b) if so, the findings thereof; and
- (c) the steps taken/being taken by the Government to protect the said marine habitat?

Answer

MINISTER OF STATE (INDEPENDENT CHARGE) FOR ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRIMATI JAYANTHI NATARAJAN)

(a) & (b) Yes. Sir. Government of India has initiated the assessment of dugongs distribution, habitat and risks due to fisheries and other anthropogenic related activities in India following the standardized Dugong catch/incidental catch survey developed by UNEP/CMS Dugong MoU Secretariat with the help of Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun. Further, the Government of India has supported the Gujarat Ecological Education and Research (GEER) Foundation, Gujarat to assess the populations of dugong using interview based survey in 2009 and found that the populations of dugong were declined in its all ranges. Primary analysis of the survey carried out by WII in 2012-13 has also confirmed that the dugong populations in Gujarat and Tamil Nadu is declining due to fisheries related activities, pollution and habitat degradation. However, the dugong population in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is found to be stable.

(c) The steps taken by the Government to protect the habitats of wild animals including marine animals in the country are as follows:

- i. Dugong has been identified as one of the 16 selected species for initiating recovery programmes in their respective habitats under the Centrally Sponsored Schemes of 'Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats'. Financial and technical assistance is provided to the Union Territory Government of Andaman & Nicobar Islands under the component 'Recovery of Critically Endangered Species'.
- ii. Legal protection has been provided to wild animals against hunting and commercial exploitation under the provisions of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972. According to the conservation and threat status, wild animals are placed in different schedules of the Act. Dugongs are included in Schedule I of the Act, which affords it the highest degree of protection under the Act.
- iii. The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, provides for punishment of offences for violation of its provisions. The Act also provides for forfeiture of any equipment, vehicle or weapon that is used for committing wildlife offence(s).
- iv. Protected Areas, viz., National Parks, Sanctuaries, Conservation Reserves and Community Reserves covering important wildlife habitats have been created all over the country under the provisions of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 to conserve wild animals and their habitats.
- v. The Wildlife Crime Control Bureau has been set up to strengthen the enforcement of law for control of poaching and illegal trade in wildlife and its products.
- vi. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has been empowered under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 to apprehend and prosecute wildlife offenders.
- vii. The State/Union Territory Governments have been requested to strengthen the field formations and intensify patrolling in and around the Protected Areas.
- viii. Strict vigil is maintained by the officials of State Departments of Forests and Wildlife.