

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

STARRED QUESTION NO:42
ANSWERED ON:09.12.2013
PROTECTION OF DOLPHINS
Hussain Shri Syed Shahnawaz

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

- (a) whether the population of dolphins has declined in the country;
- (b) if so, the details thereof including the total number of dolphins in the country at present, State/UT-wise and the reasons therefor; and
- (c) the steps taken by the Government for the protection of dolphins in the country?

Answer

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

(a) to (c) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO PARTS (a), (b) AND (c) OF THE LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO 42 REGARDING 'PROTECTION OF DOLPHINS' BY SHRI SYED SHAHNAWAZ HUSSAIN DUE FOR REPLY ON 09.12.2013.

(a) to (c) The Dolphins are animals of aquatic ecosystems. They can be generally categorized as sea and harbour dolphins, and freshwater dolphins. A Total of 15 species of sea and harbour dolphins have been reported from Indian waters and coasts. On the other hand, among freshwater dolphins, the Gangetic Dolphin is found in the Ganga river system, including its tributaries like Ghagra and Chambal, and also in the Brahmaputra river system. Apart from the Gangetic Dolphin, Indus River Dolphins have recently been reported in Punjab.

The population estimates of different wild animals are conducted by the respective State/UT Governments and are generally limited to the Protected Area network. Most of the aquatic habitat, where the Gangetic dolphin is found, is not part of Protected Area network. Few notable Protected Areas forming part of the habitat of Gangetic Dolphin are Hastinapur and Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuaries in Uttar Pradesh, National Chambal Sanctuary in the States of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, Kaziranga and Orang National Parks, Laokhowa-Buhrachapori and Dibru-Saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuaries in Assam and Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary in Bihar. The Central Government does not collate the population census data for Dolphins. However, the population estimates of Gangetic Dolphins reported by various experts at different times, till 2010 indicates it to be around 1800-2000 individuals. Population status of other dolphins is not known.

The Gangetic Dolphin inhabits aquatic river ecosystems, which pass through large number of habitations. As such, the habitats are subjected to pollution stress, resulting from activities in the habitations. The programmes of river pollution abatement like the Ganga Action Plan are helpful in improving the quality of aquatic habitat.

However, the vulnerability of the Gangetic Dolphin has been considered and the animal has been included under the Species Recovery Programme of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of 'Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats'. The States are, therefore, eligible to seek Central Assistance to implement activities aimed at recovering the population of the Dolphin. However, the Central Government has not received any Annual Plan of Operations (APO) from the State Governments to seek funding for this purpose.

The Prime Minister declared the Gangetic Dolphin as the National Aquatic Animal in the First Meeting of the National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA) on the 5th of October 2009. The Ministry of Environment and Forests subsequently notified the Ganges River dolphin as the National Aquatic Animal on the 10th of May 2010 and has also prepared a Conservation Action Plan for the Gangetic Dolphin.

The Dolphins have been granted `non-human personhood` status by the government of India, making India the first nation in the world to recognize their unique intelligence and self-awareness. India has also banned dolphin shows. All Indian States have been advised by the Government to reject proposals to hold dolphin shows or open dolphinariums.