

Expert Group Meeting on Advancing Marine Mammal Conservation in North-East Asia

11 September 2025

ESCAP East and North-East Asia Office, Incheon, Republic of Korea

Concept Note

Background

The conservation of marine mammals, particularly spotted seals (*Phoca Largha*) and narrow-ridged finless porpoises (*Neophocaena asiaeorientalis*), is critical to maintaining marine ecosystem health and biodiversity in the Seas in North-East Asia and adjacent waters. These species are increasingly threatened by habitat degradation, bycatch, climate change, and pollution. While a range of national and regional efforts exists, there remains a lack of coordinated, science-based, and transboundary approach to effectively address these challenges.

The IUCN Red List currently categorizes the spotted seal as Least Concern (LC), while the narrow-ridged finless porpoise is listed as Endangered (EN), primarily due to habitat degradation, high mortality from fisheries bycatch, and pollution. These designations highlight the urgency for enhanced conservation efforts to prevent further population decline.

At the global level, SDG 14 (Life Below Water) calls for the conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal ecosystems, urging actions to reduce marine pollution and protect marine biodiversity. The Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) also sets Target 3, the “30x30” conservation goal, to protect 30% of the world’s land and marine areas by 2030, a critical milestone for scaling up marine protected areas (MPAs) and ensuring the conservation of migratory species.¹

¹ Under the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), the narrow-ridged finless porpoise is listed in Appendix II, recognizing it as a species that would benefit from international cooperative conservation actions. Additionally, CMS Resolution 11.22 advocates for prohibiting the live capture of cetaceans for commercial purposes. While no specific CMS resolutions address spotted seals, these broader policies emphasize the need for international collaboration in marine mammal conservation. The IUCN’s WCC-2020-Rec-094

At the subregional level, Chinese and Korean researchers have conducted research on spotted seals under the Yellow Sea Large Marine Ecosystem (YSMLE) II project in the late 2010s, contributing to improved understanding of the species' ecology and informing conservation strategies. National laws, such as the Wildlife Protection Law (China), the Marine Biodiversity Conservation Strategy (Japan), and the Marine Environment Management Act (Republic of Korea), provide legal frameworks for marine mammal protection.²

Despite these efforts, key challenges remain. National policies and legal frameworks remain fragmented, making it difficult to align conservation approaches across borders. Transboundary data sharing is still limited, and stakeholders exhibit uneven capacity in research, monitoring, and management. In addition, conflicts with development activities, such as fisheries operations and coastal infrastructure projects, complicate efforts. Most importantly, the lack of a structured regional cooperation mechanism for marine mammals constrains progress.

Given the migratory nature of these species, coordinated efforts across borders are essential. Against this background, this Expert Group Meeting (EGM) aims to provide a starting point for dialogue, exploring how subregional cooperation can align with global conservation targets and agreements, and laying the groundwork for potential future collaboration through NEAMPAN. The meeting will bring together key stakeholders to encourage information exchange, identify potential synergies among NEAMPAN member countries, and help build a shared vision for marine mammal conservation in the subregion.

recommendation further reinforces the necessity of conservation actions to mitigate threats and strengthen transboundary cooperation.

² Several designated protected areas exist for the conservation of spotted seals and finless porpoises:

- **China:** The spotted seal breeds in Liaodong Bay, Bohai Gulf, with conservation stations monitoring breeding grounds and compensating fishermen for live seal releases. The finless porpoise is classified as a national first-level protected species, with reserves like the Tian-e-Zhou Oxbow Nature Reserve ensuring habitat protection.
- **Japan:** Conservation efforts for finless porpoises include studies on population trends in the inland Sea, with discussions on protected area establishments.
- **Republic of Korea:** Marine species protected areas have been designated for spotted seals in Garorim Bay and for finless porpoises in Goseong Haimyeon.
- **Russian Federation:** Spotted seals inhabit the Sea of Japan/East Sea and the Sea of Okhotsk, though specific protected areas remain unclear.

Objectives

- Facilitate knowledge exchange on the status, threats, and conservation measures related to spotted seals and finless porpoises
- Identify gaps and opportunities for transboundary cooperation
- Discuss possible approaches and mechanisms for regional cooperation and policy alignment
- Explore possibilities for research collaboration and data sharing
- Develop preliminary recommendations for an action plan, focusing on habitat protection, threat mitigation, and monitoring frameworks

Target groups

- Government officials, academia, research institutions, civil society organizations, international and regional organizations, and local communities

Expected Outcomes

- A shared understanding of conservation challenges and research findings on spotted seals and finless porpoises
- Identification of key gaps in policy, monitoring, and data sharing
- Initial recommendations and ideas for follow-up actions, such as exploring capacity-building opportunities, joint monitoring, data-sharing approaches, policy coordination, or collaborative outreach and advocacy initiatives

Programme

11 September 2025	
08:30-09:00	Registration
09:00-09:20	Opening <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opening remarks: Mr. Ganbold Baasanjav, Head, ESCAP East and North-East Asia Office Tour de Table Objectives and expected outcomes Group photo
09:20-10:40	Session 1. National Policies and Legal Frameworks for Marine Mammal Conservation <p>The session will present national policies, legal instruments, and institutional arrangements from China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the Russian Federation related to the conservation of marine mammals. It will also examine how marine protected areas (MPAs) are utilized to safeguard marine mammals and identify potential areas for strategic alignment and cooperation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderator: Mr. Simon Gilby, Sustainable Development Officer, United Nations Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD) Speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Zhang Zhaohui, Research Professor, First Institute of Oceanography, Ministry of Natural Resources of China, and Deputy Director, China-PEMSEA Center Ms. Kobayashi Mari, Professor, Tokyo Agriculture and Life Science University at Abashiri, Hokkaido, Japan Mr. Young Nam Kim, General Manager, Marine Protection and Restoration Department, Korea Marine Environment and Management Corporation (KOEM) Mr. Aleksander Burdin, Leading scientist, Kamchatka Branch of Pacific Geographical Institute, Far East Division of the Russian Academy of Sciences
10:40-11:00	break
11:00-12:20	Session 2. Cetaceans: Status, Threats, and Data Gaps for Cross-Border Cooperation in North-East Asia <p>This session will examine the current scientific understanding of cetacean populations (e.g., finless porpoise) in North-East Asia, including major threats, ecological characteristics, and broader environmental pressures. Experts will</p>

	<p>highlight recent national and regional findings, identifying key data and knowledge gaps, such as species-specific information, monitoring limitations, and habitat connectivity that hinder effective conservation. The session will also explore opportunities to strengthen cross-border research collaboration and improve data sharing and coordination across countries.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderator: Ms. Sunmin Kim, Assistant Professor, College of Veterinary Medicine, Jeju National University, Republic of Korea • Speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mr. Kexiong Wang, Professor, Institute of Hydrobiology, Chinese Academy of Sciences ○ Ms. Yuko Tajima, Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, National Museum of Nature and Science, Japan ○ Ms. Young Ran Lee, Founder and CEO, Plan Ocean, Republic of Korea ○ Mr. Aleksander Burdin, Leading scientist, Kamchatka Branch of Pacific Geographical Institute, Far East Division of the Russian Academy of Sciences
12:20-13:40	Lunch
13:40-15:00	<p>Session 3. Pinnipeds: Status, Threats, and Data Gaps for Cross-Border Cooperation in North-East Asia</p> <p>This session will review the current scientific understanding of pinniped populations (e.g., spotted seals) in North-East Asia, focusing on major threats, ecological traits, and broader environmental pressures. Experts will share recent national and regional findings, identifying key data and knowledge gaps, including species-specific information, monitoring limitations, and habitat connectivity that hinder effective conservation. The session will also explore opportunities to enhance cross-border research collaboration and improve data sharing and coordination across countries.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderator: Mr. Young Nam Kim, General Manager, Marine Protection and Restoration Department, Korea Marine Environment and Management Corporation (KOEM) • Speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mr. Hongfei Zhuang, Assistant Professor, First Institute of Oceanography, Ministry of Natural Resources, China ○ Ms. Kobayashi Mari, Professor, Tokyo Agriculture and Life Science University at Abashiri, Hokkaido, Japan ○ Mr. Gyeomjun Park, Senior Researcher, National Institute of Fisheries Science, Republic of Korea

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Alexey Trukhin, Leading Researcher and Associate Professor, V.I.Ill'ichev Pacific Oceanological Institute, Far Eastern Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences
15:00-15:20	Break
15:20-16:40	<p>Session 4. Learning from Other Regions and MPA Networks</p> <p>The session will introduce regional and global initiatives focused on marine mammal conservation. It will explore lessons learned, coordination mechanisms, and innovative practices from other regions that may offer insights and replicable models for North-East Asia.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderator: Mr. Riccardo Mesiano, Deputy Head, ESCAP East and North-East Asia Speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms. Gill Braulik, Deputy Chair, IUCN Joint SSC/WCPA Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force Ms. Gianna Minton, Co-Chair, IUCN Cetacean Specialist Group Mr. Simone Panigada, Chair of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee, Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS) Ms. Andrea Michelson, Regional Coordinator, Patagonian Forum Ms. Huo Wang, Deputy Secretary General, China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation, Chief Editor of Marine Biodiversity, and Visiting Professor at Tianjin Foreign Studies University
16:40-17:20	<p>Session 5: Pathways to Subregional Cooperation</p> <p>This session will aim to explore practical steps to enhance subregional cooperation on marine mammals, such as joint research, harmonized monitoring, data and information sharing, policy dialogue, and NEAMPAN's potential role in supporting subregional collaboration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderator: Mr. Riccardo Mesiano, Deputy Head, ESCAP East and North-East Asia
17:20-17:30	<p>Closing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Closing remarks: Mr. Riccardo Mesiano, Deputy Head, ESCAP East and North-East Asia
18:00-19:30	Dinner