

## CMS COP15 Highlights: Wednesday, 25 March 2026

The Committee of the Whole (CoW) of the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) moved through a long list of agenda items for which, unless otherwise specified, discussion continues in relevant working groups. The CoW will later review conference room papers (CRPs).

### Implementation Of Taxa-Specific And Cross-Cutting Mandates

**Crosscutting Conservation Issues: Multiple Systems of Knowledge:** The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.28.14/Rev.1](#).

BRAZIL, with FIJI, called for engagement under the principle of free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC). ARGENTINA asked that any reference to Indigenous and local knowledge be qualified by “where relevant.” The COOK ISLANDS underscored that engagement with Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) must be grounded in the respect for rights and customary governance. PANAMA said Indigenous and local knowledge could lead to more efficient monitoring and improved conservation. IPLCs urged support for and promotion of connectivity among different knowledge systems.

The Secretariat will prepare a CRP.

### Appendices and Concerted Actions

**Amendment of Appendices I and II of the Convention: Guidelines for Preparing and Assessing Proposals for the Amendment of CMS Appendices:** The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.30.1/Rev.1](#) to recognize Indigenous and local knowledge when preparing proposals for appendices.

The EU asked the Secretariat to ensure consistent use of the term “Indigenous and local knowledge,” which is the focus of amendments suggested by BRAZIL, and supported by AUSTRALIA and NEW ZEALAND. AUSTRALIA noted the importance of prompts to indicate where Indigenous and local knowledge may be appropriate.

CoW Chair Khalid Cherki (Morocco) referred the document to the working group on cross-cutting issues for further discussion.

**Concerted Actions:** The Secretariat presented [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.31.1/Rev.1](#), a document related to [Doc.30.1/Rev.1](#), to recognize Indigenous and local knowledge when preparing proposals for Concerted Actions (CA). BRAZIL suggested amendments to ensure consistent references to Indigenous and local knowledge. The Secretariat will prepare a CRP.

### CMS Appendices

**Treatment of Species Included Within Aggregated Families Listed in Appendix II:** The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.29.1](#) on progress of listing Appendix II species within aggregated families. The CoW referred the document to the COP for adoption.

**Maintaining Lists of Species Included in CMS Appendices:** The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.29.2/Rev.1](#). The CoW referred the document to the COP for adoption.

**Taxonomy and Nomenclature Updates:** The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.29.3/Rev.1](#). The EU urged that the updates be made on a regular basis. The CoW referred the document to the COP for adoption.

**Species that Meet the Criteria for Listing on CMS Appendices:** The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.29.4/Rev.1](#) and noted that the working group on aquatic species is discussing a relevant list of migratory freshwater fishes. NEW ZEALAND expressed support for developing similar strategic lists for other taxonomic groups.

The Secretariat will prepare a CRP.

**Towards Harmonization of Taxonomy and Nomenclature:** The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.29.5](#), noting the draft decision was endorsed by the Scientific Council (ScC), and contained a single amendment, to delete “external” from the phrase, “subject to the availability of external resources.”

The CoW recommended the document for adoption as amended.

### Implementation of Taxa-specific and Cross-cutting Mandates

**Aquatic Species Conservation Issues: Fisheries-induced Threats and Direct Take: Bycatch and other Fisheries-induced Mortality:** The Secretariat tabled [UNEP/CMS/Cop15/Doc.25.1.1](#).

PERU, supported by PANAMA and SENEGAL, called for the document’s definition of bycatch to include avian species. AUSTRALIA pointed to joint research work under the Pacific Island Cetacean Memorandum of Understanding to reduce entanglement and support sustainable livelihoods.

ANIMAL WELFARE INSTITUTE described the “severe” impacts on CMS-listed species of bycatch resulting from the shift in global demand from shark fins to fish maw, or swim bladders.

The Secretariat will prepare a CRP.

**Bycatch of Chondrichthyan Species:** The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.25.1.2](#). ARGENTINA highlighted national efforts to build capacity for responsible fisheries. CoW Chair Cherki noted the document would be included in the CRP prepared for the previous agenda item on bycatch.

**Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs):** The Secretariat tabled [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.25.1.3](#) and [Inf.25.1.3](#).

NEW ZEALAND pointed to efforts by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission to implement measures to reduce the impact of FADs on migratory species. INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION (IWC) expressed their commitment to collaborate on addressing FADs.

**Aquatic Wild Meat:** The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.25.1.4](#); [Inf.25.1.4a](#); and [Inf.25.1.4b](#), noting a CRP was available following the aquatic working group’s deliberations. Parties supported the draft decisions and the new terms of reference for the Aquatic Wild Meat Working Group.

BENIN, SENEGAL, CÔTE D’IVOIRE, and GHANA noted that unsustainable taking requires a socioeconomic response, citing linkages to poverty and food sovereignty. With LIBERIA, they called for increased capacity building and resource mobilization to support the implementation of the Action Plan to Address Aquatic Wild Meat Harvests in West Africa. The EU and

PANAMA called for strengthened cooperation with other MEAs, including the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and IWC, that goes beyond information sharing. NEW ZEALAND described seabirds killed and eaten by vessel crewmembers, stressing the impacts on CMS-listed species and associated risks to human health.

Benin Environment and Education Society, for the AQUATIC WILD MEAT WORKING GROUP, lamented the lack of representative data provided by Parties regarding the regional action plan's implementation. RARE CONSERVATION supported the draft decision's recommendation to expand the establishment of regional action plans.

#### **Marine Pollution and Other Threats: Marine Pollution:**

The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.25.2.1/Rev.1](#). Noting that monitoring was a key capacity gap for small island developing States, COOK ISLANDS, supported by NEW ZEALAND, FIJI, SENEGAL, SAMOA, and AGREEMENT ON THE CONSERVATION OF CETACEANS OF THE BLACK SEA, MEDITERRANEAN SEA AND CONTINUOUS ATLANTIC AREA (ACCOBAMS), stressed the importance of addressing land-based sources of pollution and plastic pollution, especially from fishing gear. ARGENTINA, with the DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, requested deleting reference to the deep seabed. UN ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME (UNEP) highlighted established protocols for pollution from land-based activities.

**Underwater Noise:** The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.25.2.2/Rev.1](#). BRAZIL said vessel speed reduction should not yet be endorsed as a noise mitigation measure. WILDLIFE CONSERVATION SOCIETY (WCS) urged for the precautionary approach and for integrating underwater noise considerations into planning using existing CMS guidelines.

**Deep-sea Mining:** The Secretariat introduced documents [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.25.2.3](#), [Doc.25.2.3/Add.1](#) and [Inf.25.2.3](#). BRAZIL said this issue falls within the mandate of the International Seabed Authority (ISA) and could support voluntary, non-binding guidance in coordination with the ISA. FRANCE called for more scientific research, strengthening the link between CMS and ISA, and, with SOUTH AFRICA, PANAMA, DEEP SEA CONSERVATION COALITION, EU, GERMANY, and CYPRUS, the adoption of a precautionary approach.

ARGENTINA opposed, saying this topic is solely under the ISA's mandate. The UK said they will not support deep-seabed mining licenses while data remains insufficient.

PANAMA noted effects could extend beyond national jurisdiction and thus should be coordinated by the CMS. NORWAY opposed, and with POLAND, said it can only take note of the report. WORLD WIDE FUND FOR NATURE (WWF) said the report's recommendations "don't go far enough."

#### **Marine Area-based Conservation Management: Priorities for Area-based Conservation of Marine Migratory Species:**

The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.25.3.1](#) on progress toward identifying and preserving marine conservation areas. SOUTH AFRICA, WWF, IWC, and OCEANCARE underscored support for the document. AUSTRALIA proposed integrating amendments suggested in [Doc.25.3.1/Add.1](#). BRAZIL suggested working group discussions on proposed amendments.

**Vessel Strikes:** The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.25.3.2](#), with [Doc.25.3.2/Add.1](#). The UK suggested amending the document, inter alia, to clarify it does not apply to species with existing advice from IWC, which was supported by INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR ANIMAL WELFARE and OCEANCARE. SOUTH AFRICA noted the need for risk assessment, vessel speed management, and coordinated responses. KENYA called for focused technology transfer.

**Conserving Seamount Ecosystems:** PANAMA and MONACO, as co-proponents, introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/25.3.3](#), noting the ecological importance of seamount ecosystems for migratory species and their vulnerability to destructive fishing practices such as bottom trawling. They outlined the ScC's contributions to preparing the draft resolution and decisions.

COSTA RICA, PERU, ECUADOR, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, NORWAY, BRAZIL, AUSTRALIA, EU, and

FIJI noted their support for both the resolution and decisions; highlighted the critical role of seamounts and the opportunity to strengthen collaboration through data sharing, joint implementation initiatives, and adaptive management plans; and provided amendments in writing.

ARGENTINA called for textual amendments to ensure terminologies are in line with agreed definitions under regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs), and stressed the potential problems of addressing conservation matters beyond national jurisdictions.

INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE (IUCN) highlighted alignment with an IUCN resolution on the same matter and expressed their commitment to support this work. OCEANCARE, for several non-governmental organizations, emphasized that prioritizing seamount protection can contribute to safeguarding critical habitats for migratory species, and suggested amendments in writing. INSTITUTO BALEIA JUBARTE welcomed the role of the CMS alongside RFMOs in managing life in the Ocean, which they underlined is "more than just resources to be extracted."

#### **Marine Mammals: Conservation Priorities for Cetaceans:**

The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.25.4.1/Rev.1](#). Several Parties stressed the importance of building on existing expertise and avoiding duplication of work with the IWC and other bodies.

**Cetacean Action Plans:** The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.25.4.2](#) on action plans for: Cetaceans in the Red Sea Region; South Atlantic Whales; the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin; and the Arabian Sea Humpback Whale.

The CoW recommended the item to the COP for adoption.

**Marine Turtles:** The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.25.5](#). KENYA noted the difficulty of requesting non-Party range states to take actions. AUSTRALIA suggested ways of reducing the reporting burdens on Parties.

The Secretariat will prepare a CRP.

**Fish: Freshwater Fish:** The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.25.6.1/Rev.1](#) and [Inf.25.6.1](#). PERU, SENEGAL, and EU supported the adoption of the proposed amendments and associated draft decisions. BRAZIL called for recognizing artisanal small-scale fishing.

WCS strongly supported the increased attention to these fish. IUCN welcomed the recognition of rivers as essential migratory corridors.

**European Eel:** The Secretariat introduced [UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.25.6.2](#) and [Doc.25.6.2/Add.1](#). The EU, with MONACO, supported the draft action plan for the European Eel. CITES noted action taken for the species under the Convention, including a draft decision to address illegal trade and sustainable management of the species.

The Secretariat will prepare a CRP.

#### **In the Corridors**

"Rain in Brazil doesn't ruin the day—it just teaches you to dance through it." And dance through it delegates did. As the clouds poured outside, they spent the day skillfully drafting language, even managing to reach agreement on a draft decision for resource mobilization. Many hoped this cooperative spirit would persist.

But the weather is always changing in Campo Grande, and as the sun re-emerged, the dance at COP15 stalled as delegates debated whether to reference resource mobilization outside the dedicated resource mobilization decision. Another beat was missed when some Parties included a reference to the concept of "common but differentiated responsibilities" in the work on wildlife health. This concept appears regularly in international environmental law but is not always met with enthusiasm due to the implication that some Parties bear greater obligations to assist than others. As one observer shared, "only by working groups continuing to dance into the night" can they hope to resolve these and other outstanding issues.