



## Ministry of Environment and Forests

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

### Dolphin Declared National Aquatic Animal

**18<sup>th</sup> May 2010:**

The Ministry of Environment and Forests notified the Ganges River Dolphin as the National Aquatic Animal today. The River Dolphin inhabits the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems of Nepal, India, and Bangladesh. It is estimated that their total population is around 2,000, and they are recognized as 'highly endangered' in Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act (1972). Announcing this, the Minister for Environment and Forests, Jairam Ramesh, said that "by giving the sub-species the National Aquatic Animal status, we hope to raise public awareness and support, especially among the younger generation, for its conservation and protection".

The Ganges Dolphin is among the four "obligate" freshwater dolphins found in the world – the other three are the 'baiji' found in the Yangtze River (China), the 'bhulan' of the Indus (Pakistan) and the 'boto' of the Amazon River (Latin America). Although there are several species of marine dolphins whose ranges include some freshwater habitats, these four species live only in rivers and lakes. The Chinese River Dolphin was declared functionally extinct by a team of international scientists in 2006.

In India, the Ganges River Dolphin is threatened by river water pollution and siltation, accidental entanglement in fishing nets, and poaching for their oil. In addition, alterations to the rivers in the form of barrages and dams are separating populations. Various organizations, including the WWF-India in Uttar Pradesh, have initiated programs for conservation and re-introduction of the River Dolphin.

The National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA) setup by the Government of India will spend Rs 15,000 crores over the next ten years for cleaning River Ganga. Professor R K Sinha (Patna University) noted that "since the Dolphins are at the apex of the food chain in river systems, if their numbers increase, it will be indicative of the success of the program".

Just as the Tiger represents the health of the forest, just as the Snow Leopard represents the health of the mountainous regions, and the Cheetah, the health of grasslands, the presence of the Dolphin in a river system signals its good health and biodiversity. This move is expected to increase support for the Government's efforts to protect this vulnerable species.