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Press release

For immediate release

## Multi-partnerships required to save the Mekong dolphins.

October 26, 2020, Kratie town: Urgent need for even more collective action to save the Mekong dolphins population from extinction after latest census, the provincial level meeting to raise public awareness today concluded, promoting stronger partnerships among all relevant actors for conserving the dolphins in the Mekong River.

The Cambodian Government's Fisheries Administration and WWF last week announced that the Mekong Irrawaddy dolphin numbers just 89, showing that the population has been stable in recent years since the last population census in 2017.

The provincial dissemination workshop was organised with the objective to update key actors and stakeholders on the situation and number of the Mekong dolphins based on the research findings from the 2020 population survey, which was led by the Fisheries Administration and WWF. The participation in the meeting included senior officials and staff from the Government's Fisheries Administration, WWF, Provincial Fisheries Cantonments, Provincial Authorities of Stung Treng and Kratie, as well as local communities, youth, NGO representatives and other partners.

Aside from reflecting conservation successes, sharing lessons learned and challenges, and coming up with new conservation measures to address the urgent need to protect the dolphins, the meeting also discussed roles of youth and local communities in safeguarding the animals in their natural habitat.

"Helping ensure the future survival of the Mekong dolphin is our duty as Cambodian citizen," said **Ms. Nuth Pisethrachna**, a student from the Department of Media and Communication of the Royal University of Phnom Penh, who was present at the today's meeting. She and 15 other members of the Young Eco Ambassador group conducted a three-day hands-on experience tour in the Kampi dolphin habitat, while the world celebrated on October 24<sup>th</sup> the International Freshwater Dolphin Day. The tour that ended today was hosted by WWF's Office in Kratie.

"By sharing, writing through digital and off-line communications about what we have learned and experienced from the dolphin landscape tour, I and all members of the youth group can contribute to dolphin conservation through raising awareness among all Cambodian people, especially young persons of the significance of the dolphins and the importance to protect the species for our nation and people's livelihoods," she added.

During their visit, the youth group was genuinely excited to experience firsthand the observation of the Irrawaddy dolphin in the River, especially as they saw the dolphins swimming in their natural habitat for the first time. They were overwhelmingly happy to learn and ask questions about the species biology,



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threats to their survival, good environmental requirements to support the species survival, as well as the law enforcement effort by the Government and WWF.

“Conserving the dolphins needs everyone including youth. Youth can play an important role in promoting the protection of the Mekong Irrawaddy dolphins in Cambodia,” said **H.E. Srun Limsong, Deputy Director-General of the Fisheries Administration**. “The level of youth engagement in this year’s Mekong dolphin event shows that Cambodian young people are more and more interested in contributing to the protection of the dolphins,” he added.

The dolphin population is ranked as critically endangered on the IUCN Red List, the highest international threat ranking for endangered species, and is fully protected under Cambodia’s Fisheries Law. The dolphins, however, continue to face great danger of entanglement in gill nets, development of upstream dams, overfishing, and illegal fishing practices such as electrofishing, among major known threats.

“Concerted conservation action in recent years has halted the decline in the population, but more effort is urgently required to ensure that the population expands,” said **Mr Seng Teak, WWF Country Director**.

All of the current and past conservation efforts were possible thanks to DGD, SDC, BMZ, WWF-Belgium, WWF-Sweden, WWF-Switzerland, WWF-Netherlands, WWF-Singapore, WWF-Germany, H&M, The King Baudouin Foundation, Research & Conservation of Zoo Nuremberg.

The Fisheries Administration and WWF are committed to continuing to work together with the local communities and other partners to boost collective efforts to implement the recommendations of the 2020 population report.

These recommendations include enforcement of the fisheries law and the ban on illegal gill net use in the protected dolphin habitat, continued robust monitoring of the species population, and management of the Ramsar site in Stung Treng province to improve natural fish stocks for food and prey enhancement for both the local communities and the dolphins.

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Link to photos: <https://bit.ly/3mtgeAx>