

Increase of strict and regular law enforcement urgently needed to save the Mekong dolphins from extinction

The Fisheries Administration and WWF mourn the tragic loss of a dolphin that was found dead in Koh Trung commune, Kratie town. The dolphin's carcass was discovered floating in the river on 22 December 2022 by a local citizen, who reported the incident to WWF and relevant authorities soon after the discovery. The dead dolphin was an adult female of 193cm long, aged between 7-10 years old, weighing about 85kg. After having examined the dolphin's carcass, the research team of Kratie fisheries administration cantonment and WWF suggested that the dolphin died after becoming entangled in monofilament gillnet with signs of gillnet discovered on the fluke of the animal.

This fatal incident marks the tenth death recorded in 2022 and the 28th death in the last 3 years. The death of a healthy adult female is especially sad, as this is a direct blow to the breeding potential of the Mekong dolphins.

"These last few days have seen the deaths of two dolphins. This is a very serious and worrying sign of the trend towards the extinction of the species in the Mekong river," lamented Mr. Seng Teak, WWF-Cambodia Country Director.

[A healthy male dolphin was also found dead just a few days ago](#). The situation has become increasingly worrisome and requires immediate protection measures to prevent the loss of the Mekong population.

"This death rate has not been seen in the last ten years," Mr. Teak said. "If this situation is not immediately addressed, this species will go extinct on our watch," he stressed.

About 70% of the Mekong dolphins' population are currently older than 20 years old, stepping out of the breeding age limit. Life expectancy of Irrawaddy dolphins is between 27-30 years old.

The mortality of dolphin calves is currently high at about 62% in the last three years, making the survival rate of calves into adulthood is low. We are deeply concerned that there is not enough new dolphin to replace the old dolphin.

WWF calls on all relevant authorities to enact and roll-out appropriate measures to urgently address the mortality caused by the known threats of gillnets and electro-fishing that are taking place in the dolphin conservation areas.

"The only solution to this man-made crisis is for all responsible authorities to implement strict law enforcement actions against these illegal fishing activities in the dolphin habitat areas – with an increase of the patrolling at nights when the majority of the illegal fishing occurs," Mr. Teak urged.