

025 Recognising India's First Dugong Conservation Reserve

RECOGNISING that dugongs (*Dugong dugon*) are classified as Vulnerable to extinction on The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ and play a vital role in maintaining the health of seagrass ecosystems;

NOTING that, on 21 September 2022, the Government of Tamil Nadu, India, declared the establishment of the country's first Dugong Conservation Reserve, in Palk Bay, covering 448.34 square kilometres, under the Wildlife Protection Act 1972, in accordance with the recommendation of the Wildlife Institute of India (Government of India);

HIGHLIGHTING that the northern Palk Bay region hosts over 12,250 hectares of seagrass meadows, which are critical feeding grounds for dugongs and serve as essential habitat for numerous marine species;

CONCERNED that habitat degradation, uncontrolled fishing practices, and climate change are severely impacting dugong populations and the ecological integrity of Palk Bay's marine ecosystems;

RECALLING IUCN Resolution 6.050 *Increasing marine protected area coverage for effective marine biodiversity conservation* (Hawai'i, 2016), Resolution 6.030 *Recognising and respecting the territories and areas conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities (ICCAs) overlapped by protected areas* (Hawai'i, 2016) and Resolution 5.094 *Respecting, recognising and supporting Indigenous Peoples' and Community Conserved Territories and Areas* (Jeju, 2012), which call for increasing marine protected areas, respecting territories conserved by indigenous peoples, and supporting community-driven conservation efforts;

AWARE OF the urgent need to implement community-led conservation strategies in Palk Bay to ensure the sustainable use of marine resources and the protection of vital seagrass habitats;

WELCOMING the innovative eco-friendly restoration techniques, such as bamboo and coconut rope frames, employed in the Dugong Conservation Reserve to promote habitat recovery and biodiversity conservation;

EMPHASISING the importance of recognizing India's Dugong Conservation Reserve for integrating community participation with scientific and conservation best practices; and

RECOGNISING and appreciating the Government of India and Tamil Nadu State Government for the establishment of India's first Dugong Conservation Reserve in Palk Bay as a critical step towards marine biodiversity conservation in South Asia and as an exemplary model for dugong conservation globally;

The IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025, at its session in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates:

1. REQUESTS the Director General, IUCN Members and Commissions to:

- a. collaborate with the Government of India, and local conservation organisations, and research institutes to support the long-term monitoring and protection of the dugong population in Palk Bay;
- b. provide technical assistance and capacity building to implement sustainable fisheries practices and promote community-based conservation efforts; and
- c. facilitate knowledge exchange with international dugong conservation projects to replicate successful methodologies for seagrass restoration and species monitoring;

2. ENCOURAGES IUCN Members, state and non-state actors, and conservation organisations to promote the adaptation, and replication where appropriate, of the Dugong Conservation Reserve model of India in other regions of the Indian Ocean and globally where dugong populations are threatened, and to work together with the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of

Wild Animals, with the aim of promoting internationally coordinated actions to ensure the long-term survival of dugongs and their seagrass habitats throughout their extensive range; and

3. URGES the establishment of international partnerships for conservation and management of dugongs in Palk Bay as they migrate between the countries, and the expansion of public awareness campaigns focused on the ecological importance of dugongs and seagrass meadows, targeting local communities and stakeholders.