

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE

LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 3709
TO BE ANSWERED ON 24.03.2025

Project Dolphin

3709. SHRI VIJAYAKUMAR *ALIAS* VIJAY VASANTH:
MS SAYANI GHOSH:
SHRI MANICKAM TAGORE B:

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE be pleased to state :

- (a) the current status of Project Dolphin along with the funds allocated and utilised since its inception, year-wise;
- (b) the details of findings of the first population estimation of riverine dolphins in the country, including the manner in which Government plans to use this data for future conservation efforts under Project Dolphin;
- (c) the steps taken by the Government to address the ongoing threats to the Ganges and Indus river dolphins, considering their vulnerable status and the slow growth rate of these species;
- (d) the specific conservation measures planned to protect this critically endangered species, especially in the face of dwindling populations;
- (e) the steps taken/proposed to be taken to address the concerns regarding human disturbances in the habitats of river dolphins along with the regulations or policies implemented to reduce such threats, particularly in the areas of fishing, water pollution and infrastructure development;
- (f) whether the Government is considering to expand the geographical scope of Project Dolphin to cover more river systems, including smaller tributaries and lesser-known dolphin habitats that may not have been included in the current survey; and
- (g) the manner in which Project Dolphin helped in the conservation of dolphins?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE
(SHRI KIRTI VARDHAN SINGH)

- (a) The major steps taken under the Project Dolphin are as follows:
 - i. A comprehensive action plan (2022-2047) has been developed under which role of various stakeholders and line Ministries have been identified for conservation of the river dolphins and aquatic habitats.
 - ii. First-ever range-wide population estimation of riverine dolphins and associated species has been carried out in the country.
 - iii. Under the Project Dolphin, first-ever satellite-tagging of the Ganges River Dolphin (*Platanista gangetica*) has been done in the country.
 - iv. The Ministry has released a National Marine Turtle Action Plan with the aim to conserve marine turtles and their habitats in India.

- v. The Ministry has released 'Marine Megafauna Stranding Management Guidelines' in 2021 for management of stranding and entanglement of marine mega fauna.
- vi. Awareness campaigns for community participation in Dolphin and other aquatic and marine species conservation have been undertaken.
- vii. Capacity building of the forest staff for dolphin monitoring and management of its habitats has been undertaken.
- viii. Financial assistance have been provided to States/UTs for conservation and management of wildlife including the dolphins, and other aquatic fauna. The detail of funds released under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme – Development of Wildlife Habitats is placed as **Annexure -I**.

(b) The population survey conducted across eight states, namely, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Assam, and Punjab estimated 6,327 riverine dolphins across the Ganga, Brahmaputra, and Indus river systems. This includes 6,324 Ganges River dolphins and three Indus River dolphins. The study has set a baseline of river dolphin population in the country.

The study has also identified the important dolphin hot spots, status of other aquatic fauna, threats and role of the community engagement, research and monitoring which plays an important role for ensuring the long term management of riverine dolphins in the country.

(c) to (e) The major steps taken by the Government for conservation of Dolphins and other associated aquatic species are as follows:

- i. Gangetic (*Platanista gangetica*) and Indus River Dolphin (*Platanista minor*) have been listed under Schedule- I of the Wild Life (Protection) Act 1972, according them highest degree of protection against hunting.
- ii. The Ministry has amended Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 in the year 2022 to empower Indian Coast Guards for entry, search, arrest and detention in case of contravention of provisions of the Act.
- iii. Financial assistance provided to States/UTs for conservation and management of wildlife including the dolphins, and other aquatic fauna under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme -'Development of Wildlife Habitats'.
- iv. Dolphins have been included in the listed of 22 identified critically endangered species, under species recovery programme of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme -'Development of Wildlife Habitats', for which financial support is provided to the State/UTs.
- v. Efforts are taken by the State Forest Departments of dolphin range states for removal of underwater ghost nets, coastline cleaning, compensation and rewards to citizens for information on dolphin stranding, collection of stray/ghost nets, and habitat monitoring.
- vi. Alternative livelihoods options are promoted to reduce dependency on activities harmful to dolphin habitats.
- vii. Partnerships with academic and research institutions is done to study dolphin ecology and threats.

(f) and (g) The Project Dolphin has provided scientific impetus and a platform for convergence of efforts being taken by the State Governments and Government of India for conservation and protection of dolphins, associated species and aquatic habitats.

Annexure-I**Annexure referred to in reply to part (a) of the Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No.3709 regarding “Project Dolphin”**

Details of funds released and utilised by States/UTs under Centrally Sponsored Scheme –‘Development of Wildlife Habitats’ during last four years:

(Amount in lakhs)

Name of State/UT	2020-21		2021-22		2022-23		2023-24	
	Fund released	Fund utilized *	Fund released	Fund utilized *	Fund released	Fund utilized *	Fund released	Fund utilized *
A& N Islands	0.0	0.0	135.8	0.0	25.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Assam	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	209.1	190.9	565.1	577.0
Bihar	205.2	138.3	410.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	336.4	325.6
Goa	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	50.1	48.3
Gujarat	124.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	200.0	84.7	207.0	207.5
Jharkhand	198.2	109.8	79.5	79.5	0.0	0.0	14.9	63.5
Karnataka	586.1	682.9	1256.6	1164.0	291.7	339.0	581.5	675.4
Kerala	731.3	700.5	295.8	205.6	224.5	313.4	921.0	921.0
Madhya Pradesh	801.6	783.1	389.3	511.4	265.6	307.2	471.8	487.5
Odisha	694.2	688.8	726.8	690.2	967.5	854.3	1005.1	1155.5
Rajasthan	309.1	549.8	1007.6	1046.3	86.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
Tamil Nadu	334.0	228.7	390.8	363.2	133.0	162.7	373.9	483.7
Uttar Pradesh	312.9	315.0	169.1	166.7	266.7	231.0	290.6	291.2
Uttarakhand	441.6	499.1	226.3	214.4	213.0	227.2	498.5	395.6
West Bengal	710.6	835.4	757.3	580.1	201.3	224.2	385.3	400.0
Lakshadweep	462.9	462.9	462.1	214.4	269.9	198.3	124.7	124.7

* Funds utilised includes unspent balance of previous year