

ACTION PLAN TO ADDRESS AQUATIC WILD MEAT HARVESTS IN WEST AFRICA

Background

1. Across most of West Africa aquatic wild animals are hunted or taken opportunistically, and the meat, body parts, and/or eggs are consumed for local subsistence, used for traditional purposes, or traded for income. Aquatic species, including mammals, reptiles, elasmobranch fish, and aquatic birds, are regularly taken in marine, coastal, and riverine ecosystems. Harvest and consumption from these ecosystems are widespread. In some places some aquatic wild meat harvests have been sustained for millennia, serving as an important source of nutrition, income, and cultural identity for some communities. Yet, food security pressure in some instances, and economic opportunities to exploit wildlife at higher levels in others, have led to unsustainable exploitation of some CMS-listed species.
2. This Action Plan to Address Aquatic Wild Meat Harvests in West Africa seeks to focus policy and science attention on these regional harvests, and where possible to take steps towards sustainable management of these activities. In some cases, this will require significant changes in community behaviour. In other cases, communities can provide direction for forward management that both respects local traditions and sustains important aquatic species and their habitats.
3. The Action Plan is segmented into six themes:
 - a) Reflecting on known science and identifying scientific gaps;
 - b) Understanding drivers and pressures (distant water fleets, internal migrations, ecosystem decline) and forming solutions;
 - c) Understanding the intersection between fisheries and environment (domestic and international) and creating stronger linkages;
 - d) Fostering community-driven solutions and building laws and enforcement where needed;
 - e) Raising Awareness and promoting behaviour change to achieve better protection of species used as aquatic wild meat; and
 - f) Developing and implementing a sustainable funding strategy for conservation of species used as aquatic wild meat.

Each theme provides focused attention on necessary capacity building (local and regional), while also setting out clear pathways for funding and capacity support. This reflects the strong need for a bottom up, community-driven approach, that gives communities across the region the ability to harness information and address unsustainable aquatic wild meat takes.

4. The Action Plan has been developed through a series of four online workshops addressing each theme and a final face-to-face workshop to build consensus on the whole. The process used a strawman of the Action Plan developed by members of the Aquatic Wild Meat Working Group (AWM WG) to support CMS Party Range States through these Action Plan negotiations.

Vision

To make tangible progress towards the sustainable management of aquatic wild meat harvesting across West Africa and to secure a positive conservation status for all impacted CMS-listed species.

Theme 1: Taking stock of scientific knowledge and identifying gaps

Aquatic species, including mammals, reptiles, elasmobranch fish, and aquatic birds, are regularly taken in marine, coastal, and riverine ecosystems. Aquatic wild meat harvest and consumption from these ecosystems is widespread. Research and its accessibility should be directed to support both Range States and communities to address unsustainable aquatic wild meat takes.

5-year theme goal: **To make known science readily available to range states across West Africa and foster the collection of information to fill the scientific knowledge gaps**

Action	Activities	Responsibility	Time frame	Resources needed
1.1. Consolidate scientific knowledge on the impact of aquatic wild meat harvest on CMS-listed species	1.1.1. Produce a briefing note on scientific knowledge for each country, with links to published documents and in the appropriate language for each country.	CMS Aquatic Wild Meat Working Group (AWM WG in collaboration with Focal Points)	2024	Desktop research and writing time
	1.1.2. Make the briefing note available to all Range States of the Action Plan.	CMS Secretariat	2024	Internal Secretariat time
1.2. Identify and address gaps in scientific knowledge	1.2.1. Assess scientific knowledge against known species distribution in each Range State and identify scientific knowledge gaps.	West African Focal Points of CMS, CITES, Abidjan Convention, Ramsar, IUCN, and FAO	2024-2026	Internal agency time
	1.2.2. Identify and approach key scientific institutions and conduct joint fundraising campaigns with them to promote their contributions to the Action Plan by conducting key research projects on the most pressing information gaps, such as: a) socio-cultural aspects of harvesting and consuming aquatic wild meat, including the role of taboos systems;	AWM WG	2024	Internal AWM WG time to both support fundraising efforts and secure scientific commitment to begin research activities

Action	Activities	Responsibility	Time frame	Resources needed
	<p>b) nutritional roles aquatic wild meat provides;</p> <p>c) quantitative assessments of consumption and trade in aquatic wild meat to better understand demand and trade pathways;</p> <p>d) ecological sustainability of current harvests, as well as the population parameters, processes, and science-based management strategies needed to overcome problems, especially in the face of climate change impacts on habitats;</p> <p>e) the design and testing of fishing methods to minimise and ultimately eliminate bycatch mortality;</p> <p>f) use of aquatic wild meat as bait for other commercial fisheries and the possibility of using alternative baits that can be derived sustainably; and</p> <p>g) migration routes for aquatic megafauna with a view to better understanding the role of immigration and emigration in populations being used for aquatic wild meat.</p> <p>h) incidence and impact of aquatic zoonoses (one health approach and definition of appropriate mitigation measures)</p>			
	<p>1.2.3. Encourage the establishment and expansion of a networks of appropriate experts and local actors with important information, specifically but not limited to within the CMS Aquatic Wild Meat Working Group and the Abidjan Aquatic Wildlife Network (working closely with other important networks in West Africa) to support Range States with the delivery of the Action Plan.</p>	AWM WG	2024-2029	Internal AWM WG time

**Theme 2:
Understanding drivers and pressures for aquatic wild meat harvest**

Understanding the drivers and pressures for aquatic wild meat takes across the region and within communities is crucial for designing mitigation programmes. Information to deepen that information should be gathered and circulated.

5-year theme goal: **To develop a deeper understand of the drivers and pressures for aquatic wild meat harvest to better inform solutions**

Action	Activities	Responsibility	Time frame	Resources needed
2.1. Better understand the root causes for overexploitation of animals used as aquatic wild meat in the region	2.1.1. Prepare a briefing note relevant to regions across West Africa on the importance of aquatic wild meat as a local food with species preferences for some countries, with an emphasis on protected species and species most affected, establishing the situation on the ground to support and enable relevant authorities to take action	Research institutions, NGOs, and Government agencies in charge, with the support of the AWM WG	2025	Desktop research and writing time
	2.1.2. Research and publish the relationship between supply, demand, and the benefit of aquatic illegal wild meat harvesting	AWM WG closely involving West African research institutions	2025	Desktop research and writing time, funding for field data collection and translation
	2.1.3. Research and publish (in French and English) a better understanding of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) and small-scale fishing fleets fishing in the region by distant water fleets in relation with to food security, and where this information is not available to highlight the need to gather this data	AWM WG closely involving West African research institutions	2025/2026	Desktop research and writing time, funding for field data collection and translation
	2.1.4. Prepare a briefing note on the vulnerability of the region aquatic ecosystems to the impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss	AWM WG in collaboration with CMS, CITES, Abidjan Convention, Ramsar, IUCN, and FAO Focal Points in each country (collating the entire body of knowledge)	2025	Desktop research writing, and translation time

Action	Activities	Responsibility	Time frame	Resources needed
2.2. Better understand the social, political and institutional drivers for illegal aquatic wild meat harvesting in the region	2.2.1. Prepare a briefing note, per country, on the socio-ecological systems across the region with focus on traditional wildlife management and governance	CMS Focal Points with the support of civil society and research institutions	2026	Funding for complimentary data collection Desktop research, writing, and translation time
	2.2.2. Prepare a briefing note on the demographic trends as consequence of human population growth and internal human migrations	CMS, CITES, Abidjan Convention, Ramsar, IUCN, and FAO Focal Points with the support of civil society and research institutions	2026	Funding for complimentary data collection Desktop research, writing, and translation time
2.3. Disseminate core information to policy makers, fisheries agencies, and wildlife managers across the region	2.3.1 Develop a strategy for the dissemination of the information generated as part of actions 1.1, 1.2, 2.1 and 2.2 (local, regional, national etc.)	AWM WG in collaboration with CMS, CITES, Abidjan Convention, Ramsar, IUCN and FAO Focal Points	2024	Funding for regional resourcing of the strategy (for both the AWM WG and also national Focal Points)
	2.3.2 Develop a fundraising strategy to support the dissemination strategy, targeting and working with donors and funders (GEF, African Development Bank etc.) and coordinate with relevant regional strategies (such as the ECOWAS West African Strategy for Wildlife Crime)	CMS Secretariat, where appropriate in collaboration with the ECOWAS Secretariat	2024	Funding for regional resourcing of the strategy (for both the AWM WG and also national Focal Points)
	2.3.3 Gather the summary and published information generated as part of actions 1.1, 1.2, 2.1 and 2.2, summarise into appropriate formats for different audiences and distribute to national fisheries and wildlife institutions across the region (as defined in the strategy @2.3.1). Generate funding proposals to support the Focal Points to increase regional capacity	AWM WG in collaboration with CMS Focal Points and other institutions and actors (NGOs etc.) to be determined in the strategy itself	2026 aiming for CMS COP probably in 2026	Funding for regional resourcing of the strategy (for both the AWM WG and also national Focal Points)

Theme 3:

Understanding the intersection between fisheries and environment (domestic and international) and creating stronger linkages

Aquatic wild meat has often been overlooked because it has not been understood to be either the mandate of fisheries or environment, yet it is both. The complexities of fisheries drivers in particular make it critical that deeper understanding of both the region’s aquatic faunal biodiversity as well as the inconsistencies of management are developed across agencies.

5-year theme goal: **To develop a deeper understand of the region’s importance in the world, address the inconsistencies of management, and the opportunities for synergies and better management**

Action	Activities	Responsibility	Time frame	Resources needed
3.1. Assess the regional potential to address global aquatic faunal biodiversity loss	3.1.1. Drawing on the information provided in actions 1.1 and 2.3, research further and create a three-page summary of the richness of the aquatic faunal biodiversity and fish stocks, the importance of both elements for food security and economic stability, and the role West African’s aquatic ecosystems play in a broader ecological context, while also making important linkages to international conventions (CITES, CBD, etc.)	AWM WG and regional research and academic institutions, as well as technical institutions in charge of management of aquatic faunal biodiversity and fisheries	2025	Desktop research and writing time
	3.1.2. Develop a briefing note of different international, regional and domestic agencies, and relevant NGOs, with focus on environment (ECOWAS, AU, ADB, FAO etc.), and identify inconsistencies	AWM WG in collaboration with CMS, CITES, Abidjan Convention, Ramsar, IUCN, and FAO Focal Points	2024	Desktop research and writing time
	3.1.3. Develop a briefing note on opportunities for international, regional, and domestic agency to better address illegal aquatic wild meat harvesting	AWM WG collaboration with CMS, CITES, Abidjan Convention, Ramsar, IUCN, and FAO Focal Points	2024	Desktop research and writing time
3.2. Understand the capacity of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) to combat illegal aquatic wild meat harvesting	3.2.1. Develop a briefing note on the mandates of CITES, CMS, and the Abidjan Conventions, and the roles of Parties and observers to create a strong signal with effective details for agency action	AWM WG and Focal Points of CMS, CITES, Abidjan Convention, Ramsar, IUCN, IWC and FAO	2024	Desktop research and writing time

Action	Activities	Responsibility	Time frame	Resources needed
3.3. Expand the action plan to reflect the intersections and opportunities	3.3.1. Meet as a region, as an online meeting, to explore opportunities for synergies between agencies and expand the action plan accordingly	West African Focal Points of CMS, CITES, Abidjan Convention, Ramsar, IUCN, IWC and FAO	2026	Internal agency time Interpretation and internet costs

**Theme 4:
Fostering community-driven solutions and building laws and enforcement where needed**

Traditional laws for protecting aquatic wildlife are often more effectively enforced than national legislation. Community driven solutions can therefore be powerful tools for conserving aquatic wildmeat species, but must be aligned with global, regional and national policies. Lack of awareness of such policies, where they exist, is a major threat to conservation of aquatic wildmeat species and this is true for community members as well as for enforcement staff. This is further compounded by inadequate human, technological and financial resources available for enforcement as well as by poverty and lack of alternative community livelihood options.

5-year theme goal: **To foster community-driven solutions, while also building laws and enforcement capacity where needed**

Action	Activities	Responsibility	Time frame	Resources needed
4.1. Foster community-driven solutions	4.1.1. Identify, document and publish good practice examples of community-driven led species conservation and appropriate aquatic wild meat management from across the region to use as a tool for awareness raising (policy makers and community)	AWM WG in collaboration with West African Focal Points of CMS, CITES, Abidjan Convention, Ramsar, IUCN, IWC and FAO	2025	Internal agency time + internet access
	4.1.2. Meet with these communities to find common learnings and solutions that can be applied elsewhere	AWM WG in collaboration with West African Focal Points of CMS, CITES, Abidjan Convention, Ramsar, IUCN, and FAO	2026	Field costs (travel and workshops) Internal agency time + internet access
	4.1.3. Repackage the information generated in actions 1.1, 2.3 and 3.1, and translate into appropriate local languages	AWM WG in collaboration with West African Focal Points of CMS, CITES, Abidjan Convention, Ramsar, IUCN, and FAO, local NGOs, civil society, and universities	2026	Internal agency time + internet access Translation costs

Action	Activities	Responsibility	Time frame	Resources needed
	4.1.4. Develop and implement a dedicated programme to disseminate these common learnings to other communities, fostering the wider uptake of community-driven solutions (including through community radios, brochures etc.) and facilitating exchange trips between communities	AWM WG in collaboration with West African Focal Points of CMS, CITES, Abidjan Convention, Ramsar, IUCN, IWC and FAO, local NGOs, civil society	2027	Ground costs associated with disseminating the information to communities Internal agency time + internet access
4.2. Increase the level of political commitment to prevent, combat, and eradicate illegal aquatic wild meat harvesting	4.2.1. Drawing on existing international and regional strategies, establish and carry out a comprehensive anti-poaching strategy for aquatic wild meat within each country, focused on engagement with communities	West African Focal Points of CMS, CITES, Abidjan Convention, Ramsar, IUCN, IWC and FAO, supported by the AWM WG	2027	Ground costs, consultants, workshops etc. Internal agency time + internet access
	4.2.2. Develop a regional plan and tools that strengthen and support national institutional capacity for efficient and effective enforcement and monitoring of illegal aquatic wild meat harvesting	West African Focal Points of CMS, CITES, Abidjan Convention, Ramsar, IUCN, IWC and FAO, supported by the AWM WG	2027	Ground costs, workshops etc. Internal agency time + internet access
	4.2.3. Create a synergy of action to support the states to achieve the CBD 30x30 objectives of protected areas and appropriate community conservation governance in the region with involvement of local communities, taking into account socioeconomic and ecological aspects as well as participatory governance	West African Focal Points of CMS, CBD, CITES, Abidjan Convention, Ramsar, IUCN, IWC and FAO and associated national committees	2027	Ground costs, workshops etc. Internal agency time + internet access

Theme 5:

Raising Awareness and promoting behaviour change to achieve better protection of species used as aquatic wild meat

Local communities do not often make biodiversity conservation or the long-term consequences of overexploitation a priority. Changing behaviours and attitudes is critical to the success of community-based solutions for protection of species used as aquatic wild meat. Education and awareness programs can help them understand the importance of sustainable resource use.

5 year theme goal: **Transforming community attitudes towards protection of species used as aquatic wild meat and local ownership of conservation measures**

Action	Activities	Responsibility	Time frame	Resources needed
5.1. Promote ownership of conservation objectives for species used as aquatic wild meat by local communities	5.1.1. Undertake Knowledge and attitudes Survey Analysis with local communities.	West African Focal Points of CMS, CITES, Abidjan Convention, Ramsar, IUCN, and FAO in collaboration with the AWM WG	2024	Internal agency time + internet access + field trips + document production and printing fees
	5.1.2 Develop an environmental education and communication (EEC) programme to promote positive changes in attitudes and behaviour to reduce aquatic wild meat harvesting	West African Focal Points of CMS, CITES, Abidjan Convention, Ramsar, IUCN and FAO, NGOs and media	2025	Internal agency time + internet access
	5.1.3. Increase capacity, information exchange, advocacy and public awareness of different community groups at local level	West African Focal Points of CMS, CITES, Abidjan Convention, Ramsar, IUCN, and FAO	2027	Internal agency time + internet access + field trips + document production and printing fees

**Theme 6:
Developing and implementing a sustainable funding strategy for conservation of species used as aquatic wild meat**

A major constraint to implementing conservation action plans, is the availability of resources that are both adequate and sustained over time. To address this challenge, it is important to engage donors early enough and establish partnerships based on the interests of the donors. Mapping donors thematic and geographic focus, ensuring donors buy into the strategic vision of the action plan, and establishing governance systems for anticipated funding are key to ensuring sustainable funding conservation of species used as aquatic wild meat.

5 year theme goal: **Establishing sustainable funding mechanisms for the protection of species used as aquatic wild meat**

Action	Activities	Responsibility	Time frame	Resources needed
6.1. Funding community-based solutions and stronger enforcement	6.1.1 Map donors with convergent geographic and thematic interests for conservation of aquatic wild meat species	AWM WG in collaboration with West African focal points of CMS, CITES, Abidjan Convention, Ramsar, IUCN and FAO.	2024	Internal agency time + internet access + Zoom
	6.1.2 Create fundraising database	AWM WG in collaboration with West African focal points of CMS, CITES, Abidjan Convention, Ramsar, IUCN and FAO.	2025	Internal agency time + internet access
	6.1.3 Establish institutional mechanisms for sustainable fundraising and management of acquired funds	AWM WG after consulting West African focal points of CMS, CITES, Abidjan Convention, Ramsar, IUCN, FAO and ECOWAS	2025	Internal agency time + internet access + Zoom
	6.1.4 Promote the funding strategy to financial partners (advocacy documents)	AWM WG after consulting West African focal points of CMS, CITES, Abidjan Convention, Ramsar, IUCN, FAO and ECOWAS	2026	Internal agency time + internet access + workshops and travel + cost of producing materials

Action	Activities	Responsibility	Time frame	Resources needed
6.2 Support coordination and implementation of the Action Plan	6.2.1. Fund and recruit a regional coordinator to support the CMS Focal Points with Action Plan delivery.	Donor agencies and West African CMS Focal Points	2024	Salary and support costs (office, travel etc.)