

IUCN/SSC Otter Specialist Group

... leading global otter conservation



Otter Specialist Group

TROPICAL ASIAN OTTER CONSERVATION MANIFESTO

Wetlands loss and otters as symbols of healthy wetland ecosystems

ACKNOWLEDGING that conserving biodiversity and maintaining the resilience of aquatic ecosystems is essential for “sustainable nature for human well-being”, a priority area for the International Union of Conservation for Nature (IUCN);

AWARE that Tropical Asia is densely populated, where one-third of the world’s population resides, and where most people live in river basins and coastal areas where population and economic growth have been the fastest growing, threatening food security and the sustainability of aquatic ecosystems;

RECOGNIZING that the rivers and adjacent seas of Tropical Asia are productive enough to support approximately 40% of the global fisheries yield and to account for about 80% of global aquaculture production, and that most Tropical Asians are dependent on fisheries;

EMPHASIZING the importance of wetlands, including large rivers and mangroves, in Tropical Asia for sustaining biodiversity and their productivity for human wellbeing, and the urgency to reduce unsustainable practices;

CONCERNED that, together with climate change effects and overfishing, increasing human activity in the rivers and coasts of Tropical Asia is expected to further reduce water availability and quality, biodiversity, resilience and sustainability of aquatic ecosystems;

RECOGNIZING that a local environmental accident or problem in one country can directly or indirectly influence and threaten the sustainability and food security of the aquatic ecosystems of neighboring countries;

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CONCERNED that otters are increasingly threatened in most parts of Tropical Asia due to heavy market-driven hunting and trafficking (including as live animals, as pelts, and as parts for medicinal use or food);

AWARE that otters are killed by fishermen in retribution for perceived fish losses, and that otter populations decline due to wetland habitat loss and other factors such as pollution, reduction of prey through overfishing, invasive alien species and increasing climate change impacts;

UNDERLINING the importance of otters as symbols of healthy wetlands and rivers, as well as freshwater biodiversity;

APPLAUDING the return of otters in Singapore and to some other Asian countries due to improved water quality and conservation measures taken by the respective governments and due to the positive attitude of local communities.

The IUCN Otter Specialist Group at its 13th International Otter Congress, Singapore, 3–8 July, 2016

APPLAUDS the ongoing research on otters in many Asian countries which documents the key role that otters play in balanced wetland ecosystems and urges the expansion of this otter research to include lesser known watersheds;

RECOMMENDS that governments in Tropical Asian countries, along with their local wildlife agencies, establish an international network for monitoring and conserving otters and their wetland habitats.

UNDERLINES the importance of effective protective enforcement instruments to control poaching of otters and illegal trade through capacity building of enforcement officials and border forces.

EMPHASIZES the necessity to actively involve local communities in the otter conservation process through participation and conservation education programs.

CALLS ON the IUCN members, National Committees and other SSC Specialist Group members in tropical Asia to initiate discussion in strengthening coordination for the conservation of otters and their wetland and mangrove habitats in their respective countries.