



Dugong Conservation Reserve in Palk Bay

Why in News?

Recently, the **Tamil Nadu government** has decided to go ahead with the **establishment of India's first conservation reserve for the Dugong in Gulf of Mannar, Palk Bay.**

- It facilitates **India to act as the leading nation in the South Asia Sub-region** with respect to dugong conservation.





What are Dugongs?

▪ About:

- **Dugong** (*Dugong dugon*) also called '**Sea Cow**' is one of the four surviving species in the **Order Sirenia** and it is the **only existing species of herbivorous mammal that lives exclusively in the sea** including in India.
- Dugongs are an **important part of the marine ecosystem** and their depletion will have effects all the way up the food chain.

▪ **Distribution and Habitat:** They are found in over 30 countries and in India are seen in the **Gulf of Mannar, Gulf of Kutch, Palk Bay, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.**

▪ **Conservation Status:**

- **IUCN Red List status:** Vulnerable
- **Wild (Life) Protection Act, 1972:** Schedule I
- **CITES:** Appendix I

▪ **Threats:**

- Dugongs **graze on seagrass** and the **loss of seagrass beds** due to **ocean floor trawling** is one of the most important factors behind decreasing dugong populations in many parts of the world.
 - **Trawling** is a **method of fishing** that involves **pulling a fishing net through the water** behind one or more boats.
 - It is **harmful to the environment** because it damages the seafloor, coral reefs and other marine animals.
- **Human activities** such as the destruction and modification of habitat, pollution, rampant illegal fishing activities, vessel strikes, unsustainable hunting or poaching and unplanned tourism are the main threats to dugongs.
 - Dugong meat is consumed under the wrong impression that it cools down human body temperature.

▪ **Steps Taken for Conservation:**

- In February 2020, India hosted the **13th Conference of Parties (CoP)** of the **Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)**, an environmental treaty under the aegis of the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**.

- The Government of India has been a **signatory to the CMS since 1983.**
- India has signed **non-legally binding Memorandums of Understanding (MoU)** with CMS on the conservation and management of **Siberian Cranes** (1998), **Marine Turtles** (2007), **Dugongs** (2008) and **Raptors** (2016).
- The **Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change** constituted a **'Task Force for Conservation of Dugongs'** to look into issues related to conservation of dugongs and implementation of the 'UNEP/CMS Dugong MoU' in India.
 - It also facilitates **India to act as the leading nation in the South Asia Sub-region** with respect to dugong conservation.

What are Conservation Reserves?

- **Conservation reserves and community reserves** are terms denoting protected areas of the country which **typically act as buffer zones** to or connectors and migration corridors between established national parks, wildlife sanctuaries and reserved and protected forests.
- Such areas are designated as conservation areas if they are **uninhabited and completely owned by the Government of India** but used for subsistence by communities and community areas if part of the lands are privately owned.
- These protected area categories were first introduced in the **Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act of 2002** – the amendment to the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972.
- These categories were added because of reduced protection in and around existing or proposed protected areas due to private ownership of land and land use.

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