

# Briefing on aquatic bushmeat for CMS Standing Committee 45

Generations of traditional societies in Africa, South and Southeast Asia, the Pacific Islands, around Latin and Central America and in the Arctic have harvested meat from the forest and animals and fish from the sea, instead of farming livestock for their nutritional needs. This harvest has long been called wild meat. In the tropics it has become known as 'bushmeat'.

The traditional lands and practices of these peoples are now threatened by unsustainable activities such as logging, mining, plantations and industrialised fishing. Local communities are not, or are only minimally, involved in official decision-making surrounding these areas.

As the forest empties and coastal fish disappear, communities have turned to hunting additional species from rivers, estuaries and the sea. Now 'aquatic bushmeat' hunting of dolphins, porpoises and small whales, dugong and manatee, seals, sea lions, walrus, polar bears, turtles and crocodiles is growing rapidly and unsustainably.

## Defining aquatic bushmeat

'Bushmeat' is defined by Convention on Biological Diversity and UN Food and Agricultural Organisation and the Collaborative Partnership on Sustainable Wildlife Management as any non-domesticated terrestrial wildlife – mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians – that have been harvested for food, medicine or other traditional uses.

OceanCare defines 'aquatic bushmeat' as the meat of aquatic wildlife – mammals, reptiles and amphibians – that have been harvested for food, medicine or other traditional uses, including as bait for fisheries. While terrestrial bushmeat tends to be restricted to equatorial regions, we argue that aquatic bushmeat is taken across the tropic, temperate, sub-Arctic and Arctic regions. Aquatic bushmeat is obtained through hunting, netting and also by making use of stranded (dead or alive) animals.

There has been some discussion about also including animals accidentally caught in fishing practice (bycatch). We believe bycatch of animals is a fisheries management problem and should be managed under the network of well established national or international fisheries regulations. Similarly, localised shark, fin-fish and shellfish fishing practice should be considered as fisheries management issues.

## The link with industrialised fisheries

What makes aquatic bushmeat particularly pressing is the reason for its growth. Salt water and fresh water fish have been an important protein resource for many communities, yet distant water industrialised fishing pressure is now removing this resource from local consumption. Local market data has provided evidence of a direct link between fish supply and subsequent bushmeat demand in villages.

So, while local enforcement of bushmeat laws is important, more attention should be paid to reducing industrialised fishing pressure on already impoverished people now turning in greater numbers to harvesting aquatic bushmeat.

## Recommendations for CMS

CMS has a key role to play in moving this issue forward by presenting the aquatic bushmeat case to the Collaborative Partnership on Sustainable Wildlife Management and by advocating for distant water fisheries management to consider the impact of overharvest in driving up aquatic bushmeat harvest.

We present the background for our recommendations in *Aquatic Bushmeat: A local issue with global responsibility*.

### Specifically, OceanCare recommends that CMS:

1. recognise the cause and effect of distant water industrialised fishing, mining, palm oil and forestry on local communities and bushmeat demand.
2. advocate for broadening the definition and discussion of bushmeat to formally encompass aquatic bushmeat and the impact of distant water industrialised fishing fleets in the Collaborative Partnership on Sustainable Wildlife Management and with the Convention on Biological Diversity and UN Food and Agricultural Organisation.
3. establish a terrestrial and aquatic bushmeat working group within the CMS Scientific Council to provide CMS specific advice to CMS Parties and the Collaborative Partnership on Sustainable Wildlife Management.