

WCC-2012-RES-030-EN

The conservation of Asian horseshoe crabs

RECOGNIZING that of four species of horseshoe crabs found globally, three, namely *Tachypleus tridentatus*, *Tachypleus gigas* and *Carcinoscorpius rotundicauda*, are restricted to Asia (hereinafter collectively “Asian horseshoe crabs”) and are facing similar threatening processes;

NOTING that range States include, but are not limited to, India, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines, China and Japan, and that Asian horseshoe crabs have symbolic cultural value in parts of Asia;

RECOGNIZING that horseshoe crabs belong to a class of arthropods termed Merostomata, that are closely related to the pre-historic trilobites, and are accordingly of paleontological significance;

RECOGNIZING that Asian horseshoe crabs have bio-medical significance and that their blood, especially of *T. tridentatus*, is employed in the pharmaceutical industry to produce the bacteria-detecting Tachypleus Amoebocyte Lysate (TAL);

NOTING that their habitats include seabeds, intertidal sandy beaches and mudflats, mangroves, river inlets and seagrass beds, and that these serve, *inter alia*, as dwelling zones, foraging grounds, breeding areas, hatcheries and nurseries;

RECOGNIZING, even as ecological studies are being undertaken, that they have an extremely important place in the marine food chain as scavengers and as predators and prey, and that their eggs and young could help sustain bird and marine species;

RECOGNIZING that the classification of all three species of Asian horseshoe crabs as “Data Deficient” on the *IUCN Red List* was published in 1996 and has been recognized as in need of updating, especially in the light of current knowledge;

WELCOMING the recent establishment of the Horseshoe Crab Specialist Group under the auspices of the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC), and ACKNOWLEDGING the efforts being made by conservationists and scientists to study their distribution patterns, ecological needs, reproductive behaviour, population status and their relationship with other species, throughout their range and threats facing them;

RECALLING especially Resolution 2.20 adopted by the 2nd IUCN World Conservation Congress (Amman, 2000) on the *Conservation of marine biodiversity*;

CONCERNED that Asian horseshoe crab populations have been or may be decimated by:

- a. habitat destruction and degradation caused by land reclamation, coastal dredging and development, the construction of coastal fortifications that prevent beach expansion, shoreline modification, and the excavation and disturbance of seabeds;
- b. habitat disturbance and the impact of pollution on populations and habitats; and
- c. the exploitation, harvesting and trade in Asian horseshoe crabs, particularly, *T. tridentatus*, for the commercial production of TAL, and *T. tridentatus* and *T. gigas* for food, and losses resulting from fisheries’ by-catch;

CONCERNED that population declines may be accelerated by low population density, low genetic diversity, limited connectivity among populations, low survival rates of eggs and

young and climate-change induced sea-level rise, such that restoration of viable populations may be challenging;

RECOGNIZING that their conservation can best be advanced by national and regional governments, non-governmental organizations, indigenous and community groups, educational, zoological and scientific bodies, and the private sector; and

RECOGNIZING that, given the various threats faced by Asian horseshoe crabs throughout their range, it is essential to apply the Precautionary Principle as set out in Principle 15 of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and noted in Resolution 3.075 *Applying the Precautionary Principle in environmental decision-making and management* adopted by the 3rd IUCN World Conservation Congress (Bangkok, 2004), and to expedite all efforts to conserve them, even as research is being undertaken and data are being gathered to support their conservation;

The World Conservation Congress, at its session in Jeju, Republic of Korea, 6–15 September 2012:

1. ENCOURAGES Members to conserve Asian horseshoe crabs as important biological resources essential for sustenance of broader ecosystems, as important natural and scientific resources needing sustainable management and as culturally symbolic species’;
2. ENCOURAGES Members to identify critical habitats that sustain them and recalling Decision VII/5 of the 7th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) on National Frameworks of Marine and Coastal Protected Areas, to address, through appropriate integrated marine and coastal management approaches, all threats to their habitats, including all activities and incentive systems that support their destruction and unsustainable use and to formally protect these habitats;
3. RECALLING Resolution VII.21 of the 7th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands on enhancing the conservation and wise use of intertidal wetlands, ENCOURAGES Members to identify, conserve and, where appropriate, designate as wetlands of international importance, intertidal wetlands, including mudflats, sandy beaches, mangroves and seagrass beds that sustain and support Asian horseshoe crab populations, and to propose them as “flagship species” for the conservation of such ecosystems;
4. ENCOURAGES Members to promote sustainable development in areas adjacent to Asian horseshoe crab habitats with a view to protecting those habitats, to discourage activities that could adversely affect the connectivity between different habitats or alter natural processes, such as tide-flows, and to rehabilitate and restore degraded ecosystems, and re-stock populations to promote the recovery of their numbers;
5. URGES Members to identify the threats faced by Asian horseshoe crabs in national and local jurisdictions, to support the use of legislative, regulatory and policy instruments and alternative mechanisms, including incentive systems, financing structures and management strategies, in addressing their conservation and to support the introduction of provisions relating to them and the efforts of enforcement agencies in protecting them;
6. ENCOURAGES Members to promote citizen science, community participation, education and greater awareness, as integral elements in the conservation of Asian horseshoe crabs and as prerequisites for the development of capacity and knowledge that will further such efforts;

7. URGES Members to encourage in all jurisdictions greater research and study into Asian horseshoe crabs and challenges to their conservation, and to support and facilitate the efforts of the IUCN Horseshoe Crab Specialist Group; and
8. ENCOURAGES transboundary cooperation by States, non-governmental organizations and educational, scientific and zoological bodies to further their conservation.

State and agency Members of the United States abstained during the vote on this Motion for reasons given in the US General Statement on the IUCN Resolutions Process.