

Galati Declaration on Sturgeon Conservation in the Danube Basin and the Black Sea

The overall objective of the Conference in Galati on Conservation of Sturgeons (GSC19), Conservation of Danube Sturgeons - a challenge or a burden?", on 28-30 October 2019 – jointly organised by “Dunarea de Jos” University of Galati (Research and Development Center for Sturgeon, Aquatic Habitats and Biodiversity) with DSTF (Danube Sturgeon Task Force), Romanian Ministry of Water and Forests, Romanian Ministry of Environment, NAFA (Romanian National Agency for Fisheries and Aquaculture), WSCS (World Sturgeon Conservation Society) and WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature), under the patronage of the Romanian Presidency of the EUSDR (EU Strategy for the Danube Region) and the Romanian Academy was to address actions needed to conserve the critically endangered population of sturgeons in the entire Danube Basin, the Danube Delta and the Black Sea.

The Conference was attended by 120 delegates from fisheries, water and environmental administrations, the scientific community and civil society in Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary, Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Turkey, Croatia, Slovenia, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, France, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, Canada and the European Commission. It was the first ever joint discussion of sturgeon conservation issues between representatives from the Danube Basin and the Black Sea countries.

The key objective was to support the concrete implementation of the Pan European Action Plan for Sturgeons (PANEUAP, adopted by the Bern Convention and endorsed under the EU Habitats Directive) in the Danube Basin.

The Conference also focused on the elaboration of key messages to decision makers in all relevant institutions and other stakeholders as a basis for shaping future actions and the way forward to save sturgeons from extinction.

The declaration below was adopted unanimously by all conference participants. Its messages are intended to serve as a basis for urgently required follow-up sturgeon conservation activities across countries and sectors on all relevant levels:

The participants in the Galati Conference on Sturgeon Conservation RECALL that

- we know what to do to protect and restore sturgeon populations in the Danube and Black Sea basins and that we are not starting from scratch;
- the Pan European Action Plan (PANEUAP) is the framework for structuring sturgeon conservation at the national, regional and European levels and its implementation should be monitored and regularly reviewed;
- despite existing fishing bans all Danube sturgeon populations continue to decline and thus implementation of the actions of the PANEUAP is of the utmost urgency;
- conservation of sturgeons is an ongoing, long-term challenge;
- many players need to be involved and both basin-wide and national coordination across sectors is key to success;

- a focal point for sturgeon conservation should be nominated by each country to the EU and to the Bern Convention.

They furthermore

- EMPHASISE the need to have a sound and improved monitoring of sturgeon populations in place as outlined in the PANEUAP. This is a prerequisite for taking targeted action to save the surviving sturgeon populations;
- URGE all competent authorities to acknowledge the importance of sound monitoring and to provide sufficient resources for these activities on a long-term basis;ⁱ
- APPRECIATE that the coordination of monitoring across borders and the sharing of data have started; and
- URGE the competent authorities to enhance the monitoring considerably to ensure more accurate cross-border assessments of sturgeon populations, including the establishment of a joint monitoring working group involving also stakeholders;ⁱⁱ
- REAFFIRM that populations need protection from further losses of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, such as poaching, and from by-catch, to prevent their extinction and for effective conservation;ⁱⁱⁱ
- UNDERLINE that effective fishing bans and conservation efforts have to be long-term due to late maturity of sturgeons and resulting long lifecycles);^{iv}
- REAFFIRM that action is needed to protect sturgeons from being caught as by-catch in their feeding areas in the Black Sea where they spend most of their lifecycle;^v
- EMPHASISE the need to improve institutional capacities of authorities competent for management of sturgeon populations and enforcement of measures^{vi};
- EMPHASISE the need for an institutional coordination mechanism for management of inland fisheries;
- ENCOURAGE authorities to find sustainable solutions for fishing communities;
- EMPHASISE the need to raise consumer awareness and reduce demand for illegal caviar and meat from wild sturgeon^{vii};
- UNDERLINE the importance to communicate with and raise awareness in fishing communities and engage them actively in conservation measures;
- RECALL that protection and restoration (where necessary) of key habitats for feeding and spawning are prerequisites for the survival of populations still living in the wild and for conservation measures (such as for supportive releases) to be effective;^{viii}
- RECALL also that protection and restoration (where necessary) of migration corridors are key to successful conservation;^{ix}
- URGE all competent authorities
 - to DEPLOY all relevant instruments and to take all appropriate measures to ensure that no deterioration of the still remaining habitats and migration corridors take place and that, where necessary, restoration efforts are undertaken; and
 - to ENHANCE ongoing efforts to overcome the barriers to migration of fish across the barriers at the Iron Gate.
 - to APPLY the precautionary approach when designing infrastructure projects in the sturgeon range
- URGE all range states to strengthen the marine and riverine protected areas system and green infrastructure towards effective management of sturgeon habitats;

- AFFIRM that with the current status of Danube sturgeon populations, ex-situ measures are essential for their survival given that these represent the last chance to conserve autochthonous sturgeon species for re-establishment programmes in the Danube. Ideally three ex-situ facilities should be established in the Danube Basin to avoid the loss of a species through technical or human error;^x
- REQUEST a clear and significant commitment to ex-situ conservation by national and regional bodies for sturgeon conservation;
- RECOMMEND that range countries agree upon sites, cost split, targets, guidelines and exit strategies for joint ex situ facilities;
- EMPHASISE that support for ex-situ conservation from both national and international funding instruments is urgently needed, preferably as long-term core funding;^{xi}
- EMPHASISE that ex-situ measures should be carried out in close collaboration and by sharing costs between the countries sharing the same stocks^{xii};
- EMPHASISE that criteria for rearing of sturgeons in ex-situ facilities must apply the principles to ensure fitness for survival and the genetic diversity as the primary targets;
- RECOMMEND that ex-situ facilities should mainly be non-commercial to avoid financial dependency but nevertheless making the best use of know-how and resources of the private sector;
- RECOMMEND verifying the suitability of sturgeons of Danube origin in commercial farms for ex-situ measures^{xiii};
- EMPHASISE that target-oriented funding and reliable competent structures are a prerequisite for successful implementation of the PANEUAP;^{xiv}
- STRESS that continuous monitoring of the implementation of the PANEUAP is vital for the effectiveness of measures and reaching its objectives;^{xv}
- UNDERLINE that promotion of sturgeon conservation across all relevant entities of government is a prerequisite for effective action^{xvi};
- URGE all the Lower Danube and Black Sea States and the relevant competent fisheries authorities to cooperate and coordinate measures to monitor, protect and restore the sturgeon populations in the Lower Danube and the Black Sea;
- RECOMMEND anchoring sturgeon conservation in relevant macroregional strategies and the Black Sea Maritime Agenda;
- furthermore CONSIDER that the participation across all relevant levels of government may facilitate access to international funding instruments where such funding is necessary^{xvii};
- CALL on competent authorities of EU Member States to ensure that the financial needs for the implementation of PANEUAP are included in the national Prioritized Action Frameworks under the Habitats Directive and the national programming of EU funds^{xviii};
- CALL on the European Commission and the competent authorities of EU candidate and Eastern Partnership countries to consider sturgeon conservation measures in their agreements about funding.

Adopted in Galati on 29 October 2019

ⁱ action 5.1.3 of PANEUAP

ⁱⁱ result 5.3 of PANEUAP

ⁱⁱⁱ result 1.1 of PANEUAP

^{iv} action 1.1.1 of PANEUAP

^v result 1.2

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- vi action 1.1.3 and 1.1.4 of PANEUAP
 - vii result 6.2 of PANEUAP
 - viii corresponding to objective 3 of the PANEUAP
 - ix objective 4 of PANEUAP
 - x objective 2 of PANEUAP
 - xi action 2.1.2 of PANEUAP
 - xii result 2.3 of PANEUAP
 - xiii Action 2.1.4 of PANEUAP
 - xiv result 7.1 of PANEUAP
 - xv result 9.1 of PANEUAP
 - xvi action 8.2.1 of PANEUAP
 - xvii result 7.1 of PANEUAP
 - xviii action 7.1.2 of PANEUAP

