



الهيئة العامة للبيئة - أبو ظبي
 Environment Agency - ABU DHABI
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**The Opening Address to the Meeting on the Memorandum of Understanding on
 Dugong Conservation and Management**

**By: H.E. Majid Al Mansouri, General Secretary of the Environment Agency - Abu
 Dhabi**

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the United Arab Emirates for the meeting of the Memorandum of Understanding on Dugong conservation. I am especially privileged to welcome you all to Abu Dhabi and trust that you will have a happy and productive stay in this beautiful city which was once the bastion of a thriving pearling industry.

This meeting comes after a series of concurrent workshops concerning the Dugong Conservation and Management Plan in East Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean and West Indian Ocean sub-regions, which mark an important milestone in our efforts towards protection of dugongs in particular, and other important wildlife resources in general, and to find a balance between the conservation and development of our marine environment.

The UAE's coastal and marine environment is an integral part of our country's cultural heritage. We have a relatively long coastline stretching about 700 kilometers and touching two bodies of water, the Arabian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. Coastal and marine resources are among our country's great natural assets, as they contribute to the country's economy and support the livelihoods of the populations who mostly live in coastal areas. The fishery sector directly employs close to 20,000 fishermen, and the UAE is an important fish producer in the Arabian Gulf region ranking second in terms of fish production among the Gulf countries.

The marine transport in U.A.E is considered as a key component in trade movement and oil export. Tourism, recreational and leisure activities, as well, are increasingly playing an important role in the economy of the country.

The Emirate of Abu Dhabi is particularly rich in marine wildlife species of which dugongs, sea turtles and small cetaceans are the most prominent. Indeed the population of dugongs in the waters of the Emirate constitutes the second largest concentration of the species in the world after Australia.

The UAE under the wise leadership of H.H. Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan and following the example of the father of the nation and “the Man of the Environment”, the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan , May Allah rest his soul in peace, took several steps to ensure the protection and conservation of our environment.

With regards to dugongs in particular, the government has taken several steps towards protection of this animal and conservation of its habitats. Dugongs which have been the subject of detailed research work and monitoring for almost 8 years by the Environment Agency are accorded full protection under the law. The Agency has also approved and is implementing a conservation and management plan for dugongs in the Emirate that is in line with the one proposed by the dugong range states and deliberated during the workshops preceding this meeting. Key elements of this conservation plan includes increasing understanding and awareness on dugongs, reducing risks and causes of mortality for the species and conserving their habitats in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, in particular, and in the country in general.

In closing, I believe that the signing of the MoU and the adoption of the conservation and management plan are exciting initiatives. It would be prudent to observe, however, that these initiatives are only a first step and need to be followed up by concrete plans and programs for their implementation on the ground if we are to succeed in this noble endeavour of ours.

Thank you and good luck with your deliberations.