



**Consultative Meeting “Identifying solutions to human-wildlife conflict involving Saiga
Antelopes in Kazakhstan.”**

Part 2: Astana Meeting

Astana, Kazakhstan, 25 May – 27 May 2023

UNEP/CMS/SCMA/Outcome 1

**Experts’ recommendations for Saiga conservation and management in Kazakhstan, taking
into account insights gained on the field visit to Western Kazakhstan**

General finding:

Kazakhstan's saiga populations are growing fast. In 2023, official aerial surveys showed an increase in the overall population of 45%, reaching close to 2 million individuals. Although the Ustyurt population is still relatively small, both the Betpak-Dala population (745,300 individuals estimated) and the Ural population (1,130,000 individuals estimated) are above the numbers seen in the 1980s when the species was managed for consumptive use.

Currently, local people in West Kazakhstan are complaining about damage to their lands from presence of large numbers of saigas. Our expert group observed first-hand a large saiga herd in close proximity to a village, and we discussed the problems of conflict between saigas and local people with a range of different people including farmers, local government officials and Okhotzooptom rangers.

We therefore find that the Ural population in West Kazakhstan in particular has reached population numbers that justify sustainable consumptive and non-consumptive use. The other populations may also be at, or approaching, that level. We therefore support the development of a Strategy for the Conservation and Management of Saiga Antelopes which involves sustainable use of saiga populations based on agreed rules (including taking no more than 10% of the population in any given year, and that the ratio of males to females in the population should be no less than 1:5 after the offtake). This management should be designed to benefit saiga populations, the wider ecosystem, and local people and take into account both the biology of saigas and socio-economic factors.

We congratulate the Government of Kazakhstan, and all the people involved (including Okhotzooptom, the Forestry and Wildlife Committee, and especially local communities) on the success of their saiga conservation, and we are keen to support them in whatever way we can in the future implementation of their Strategy for Conservation and Management of Saiga Antelopes.

Recommendations for immediate actions:

1. Gain an understanding of who is most affected by the increase in saiga numbers, and in what way, through a comprehensive and participatory assessment;
2. Analyze underlying factors of the conflict between local land users and Saiga, such as general availability of water resources and pasture, hay and arable land, impact of drought, impact of locust and general livelihood concerns, ownership of and benefit from natural resources including saigas;
3. Explore approaches to minimizing the impacts of saiga populations on negatively affected people, e.g. through exploring methods for excluding Saiga from specific areas during critical times;
4. Explore approaches to paying local land users a conservation reward for hosting Saiga on their land as a short-term measure;

5. Communicate the recommendations of the experts, the outcome of the consultations in Astana and the agreed strategy urgently to local land users to show that their concerns are heard and actions are being taken.

Recommendations for short-, medium-, and long-term actions:

1. Substantial research has shown that Saiga cannot be confined to particular areas. Therefore, landscape-scale planning needs to be conducted, improving the availability of saiga habitat and the coexistence of people and wildlife, through supporting the overall connectivity of the landscape for saiga and other species;
2. Responsibilities for saiga conservation and management should be reviewed in a participatory process, to establish a system with enhanced local participation, which fosters trust and accountability among all stakeholders;
3. Local people in the Saiga range need to be involved in the conservation and management of Saiga and need to directly benefit from any sustainable use system;
4. Analyze preconditions and preparatory actions for consumptive and non-consumptive use of saigas (whether for large-scale commercial harvest, hunting tourism, or ecotourism) and the interactions between them, in consultation with the people concerned at the local level;
5. Analyze the steps required and implications arising from engaging in domestic and international trade in saiga products, and take preparatory actions such as implementing stockpile management, understanding effects on domestic meat markets, and commencing actions towards lifting the zero-export quota under CITES;
6. Urgently develop capabilities and technical capacity for implementing the Strategy for the Conservation and Management of Saiga Antelopes, including implementing pilot projects, drawing where helpful on the experiences of other countries;
7. Consistent and fast communication channels need to be established to ensure that actions taken are transparently and reliably passed on among stakeholders.

Experts



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