Rare Chinese white dolphin gets DNA bank

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A Chinese white dolphin swims off the coast of Hong Kong in August 2011. A Hong Kong conservation group has set up a DNA bank for the rare Chinese white dolphin, also known as the pink dolphin, in a bid to save the mammals facing a sharp population decline.

A Hong Kong conservation group said Saturday it has set up a DNA bank for the rare Chinese white dolphin, also known as the pink dolphin, in a bid to save the mammals facing a sharp population decline.

There are about 2,500 Chinese white dolphins in the Pearl River Delta region, the body of water between Macau and Hong Kong, with the

majority of the mammals in Chinese waters and the rest in Hong Kong.

But experts say their number has dropped significantly in the past few years due to overfishing, an increase in maritime traffic, water pollution, habitat loss and coastal development.

In a bid to save the dwindling population, the Ocean Park Conservation Foundation Hong Kong said it had joined hands with a Chinese university to set up a DNA bank, which will also spearhead a genetic research project.

"We hope to offer the scientific community a standardised genetic analysis platform to assess the sustainability of Chinese white dolphin populations," Judy Chen, the foundation chairwoman said in a statement.

"The collected data will provide important reference to governments in the region for developing critical strategies of Chinese white dolphin conservation," she added.

The biological samples of these dolphins will be sent to the DNA bank to investigate the environmental impacts on the mammal, the statement said.

The Chinese white dolphins, a sub-species of the Indo-Pacific humpback dolphins, are unique for their pink skin. They are listed as "near threatened" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

The mammal was the official mascot at the handover ceremony when the former British colony returned to Chinese rule in 1997, while dolphin watching is a favourite tourist attraction in Hong Kong.

Its population in Hong Kong has dropped from an estimated 158 in 2003 to only 75 in 2010, according to the Hong Kong Dolphin Conservation

Society.

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