

Cambodia creates safe zones for Mekong dolphins

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Thai diving operators dress in diving suits pose for a photo next to a picture of a Irrawaddy Dolphin in Bangkok in 2004. The Cambodian government on Friday said it will limit fishing in a zone in the Mekong River to protect critically endangered freshwater dolphins.

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The Irrawaddy dolphin conservation area will cover a 180-kilometre-long (110 miles) stretch of river from eastern Kratie province to the border with Laos, the government said after the measure was approved in the weekly cabinet meeting.

Fishing will still be allowed inside the zone but the use of floating

houses, fish cages and gill nets will be banned as they risk endangering the dolphins.

The government estimates there are between 155 and 175 Irrawaddy dolphins left in Cambodia's stretch of the [Mekong River](#), while WWF last year put the figure at just 85.

The newly created zone "will serve the eco-tourism sector and sustainably preserve dolphins," the statement said.

Entanglement in gill nets is seen as the leading cause of death in adult Irrawaddy dolphins, according to conservation group WWF. The animals also suffer from high [calf mortality](#) rates, the cause of which remains unclear, and from [habitat degradation](#).

Acting WWF-Cambodia country director Michelle Owen said the creation of the protection zone was "welcome news" that "demonstrates the commitment of the Cambodian government to conserve this iconic and endangered species".

The Mekong River Irrawaddy dolphin has been listed as critically endangered since 2004, according to WWF.

Irrawaddy dolphins are also found in coastal areas in south and southeast Asia, in the Irrawaddy river in Myanmar and in the Mahakam river in Indonesia.

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