

IUCN and World Heritage mission to the Sundarbans in Bangladesh

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Bangladesh



The Sundarbans in Bangladesh is part of the world's largest mangrove forest, lying on the delta of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers and bordering India's Sundarbans National Park, also a Ramsar Site.

A mission report making a set of 10 recommendations for action to secure the long-term protection of the Sundarbans, Bangladesh has just been published. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) carried out a field mission to the site in March 2016, jointly with UNESCO's World Heritage Centre, to monitor its state of conservation. The Sundarbans is part of the world's largest mangrove forest. The area was designated a **Sundarbans Reserved Forest Ramsar Site** in 1992 and covers 601,700 ha. The site is home to the royal Bengal tiger.

Sundarbans is exposed to a number of threats including a coal-fired power plant project. The **monitoring mission report** highlights the need for urgent action to protect the Sundarbans' World Heritage 'outstanding universal value'. It takes into account a wide range of information, including from consultation both during and after the monitoring mission with various stakeholders, such as the State Party of Bangladesh, park authorities, local and international non-governmental organisations, and civil society.

Key recommendations of the report call for a stop of projects threatening to damage the Sundarbans' exceptional natural values. The report recommends that the Rampal power plant project, planned in a location just 65km from the World Heritage site, be cancelled and relocated. It also calls for developments of the Orion power plant and any other similar projects that may be proposed, to be halted until a scientifically sound assessment of their environmental impacts on the site's World Heritage values has been submitted for review by IUCN.

Another crucial recommendation is to put in place a system to integrate into the site's management some key aspects regarding the many activities affecting the Sundarbans. Such a system should aim to: ensure sufficient freshwater flows into the site, which has been affected by a rise in salinity as a result of increased water extraction for farming, industrial development and barrage construction; assess economic activities such as dredging and shipping



It is estimated that about 6.5 million people depend directly or indirectly on the wider Sundarbans ecosystem for their livelihoods.

strategically, taking account environmental impact on the area and the World Heritage site; and provide sufficient resources to control illegal activities, such as poaching of wildlife.

The monitoring mission was invited by the state of Bangladesh following a request in 2015 by the World Heritage Committee. As the **advisory body on natural World Heritage**, IUCN provides independent technical advice to support the long-term conservation of listed natural sites. Recommendations arising from such missions are intended as a constructive process to secure the highest level of protection expected of World Heritage status.

Bangladesh is expected to submit a follow-up report to UNESCO's World Heritage Centre by 1 December 2016. Necessary action for the long-term conservation of the Sundarbans will be discussed at the 41st World Heritage Committee meeting in July 2017.

Source: IUCN

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