
European Sturgeon Conference – Key Messages

The overall objective of the Conference – jointly organised by Austria in the frame of the Austrian EU Presidency and the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River – was to raise awareness to the challenges in place and to trigger comprehensive action for sturgeon conservation and restoration in the Danube Basin as well as at Pan European level. The Conference brought together 50 experts from national administrations, EU and international institutions, academia and NGO representatives, who can all potentially provide the long-term framework of action indispensable for the conservation of sturgeon stocks in Europe. All presentations, relevant background information including the agenda as well as a group picture of the Conference can be accessed here: <https://danubis.icpdr.org/event/18288>.

The Conference focussed on the elaboration of key messages to decision makers in all relevant institutions as a basis for shaping future actions and the way forward for sturgeon conservation to save sturgeons from extinction. Out of the wealth of information received and by incorporating voices from all over Europe, Canada and United States over the two days of the European Sturgeon Conference, the following messages were identified which will serve as a basis for urgently required follow-up sturgeon conservation activities across countries and sectors on all relevant levels.

All Conference participants jointly convened on the following key messages of the European Sturgeon Conference:

- **Autochthone sturgeon stocks are on the brink of extinction in Europe. However, the urgency for the needs of action is not properly reflected in the Annexes of the Bern Convention and the EU Habitats Directive respectively. Despite of this, tools are in place and urgent conservation actions are needed for all sturgeon species.**
- **Utmost need is given to urgently implement *Ex situ* facilities (i.e. “facilities to save species from the threat of extinction and to maintain the genetic integrity and heterogeneity of a species or population under controlled conditions - IUCN 2013”) given that these represent the last chance to conserve autochthone sturgeon species for re-establishment programmes in the Danube Basin. Ideally, three ex situ facilities should be set up downstream as well as upstream of Iron Gate. The absolute minimum required would comprise two installations. In addition, there is further need for ex situ facilities in other regions as well.**
- **On top of the necessary investment costs, running costs are estimated to be in an order of magnitude of 0,5 – 1,5 Mio Euro per year and per ex-situ facility.**
- **The life cycle of sturgeons covers inland waters, estuaries as well as marine waters. Protection and connectivity of all sturgeon habitats in all these waters is a prerequisite to avoid interference in their natural habitat, secure their survival and to guarantee the success of re-establishing programs. The protection of sturgeon habitats necessitates the highest level of coordinated action and cooperation across and between countries and sectors.**
- **Enforcement of measures and sustainable results require a long-lasting stable financial framework. Countries, international institutions and organisations are urged to join efforts in securing sustainable financial frameworks as precondition to the preservation of sturgeons from extinction.**

- **Ecological connectivity is essential for ensuring the migration corridors for sturgeons. Further deterioration of existing and potential migratory corridors must be avoided. Up to date fish passage solutions are available. Further work is needed to improve the effectiveness of fish passage solutions.**
- **Inspiring examples for sturgeon action plans and successful implementation are in place. However, more efforts are needed in updating outdated sturgeon action plans or establishing new action plans reflecting latest scientific progress and needs for action. A Pan-European Sturgeon Action Plan under the Bern Convention and a Species Action Plan under the EU Habitats Directive would provide a coherent framework for coordinated actions and should urgently be developed and implemented.**
- **There exists a strong need for coordination amongst all relevant actors and across countries for a better integration of measures under implementation and for harmonised and effective approaches to monitoring and conservation measures.**
- **Countries, macro-regional strategies and EU institutions can play an instrumental role in securing a sustainable implementation and providing financial framework for sturgeon conservation. An enhanced engagement at all levels to save sturgeons from extinction is thus called for.**
- **Deep concerns were expressed about the level of enforcement on sturgeon fishing ban and illegal caviar trade activities, which constitute a severe threat to the future of sturgeons. These illegal activities represent a huge set - back for all conservation efforts and need to be rigorously addressed in particular by relevant competent national authorities with international support.**
- **Informing the public on all aspects of sturgeon conservation and requirements and promoting public awareness of the plight of the sturgeon is seen as an overriding need. Raising awareness to save sturgeons from extinction is crucial to getting long-term support from key target groups and relevant actors.**

Conference participants remain committed to engage themselves in their field of work, to promote the need for action and to raise public awareness to contribute to save sturgeons from extinction.