

**Protection and rehabilitation of Ganges river dolphins**

142. PROF. M.V. RAJEEV GOWDA: Will the Minister of WATER RESOURCES, RIVER DEVELOPMENT AND GANGA REJUVENATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Ministry has taken any recent steps for the protection and rehabilitation of the Ganges river dolphins that has been threatened by deteriorating river water quality arising from deforestation, pollution and entanglement in fisheries nets as well as factors such as the vast area that has been altered by the construction of more than 50 dams in recent years;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether any recent studies have been able to ascertain the number of such species in the Ganges; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF WATER RESOURCES, RIVER DEVELOPMENT AND GANGA REJUVENATION (SHRI SANWAR LAL JAT): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Based upon the 'Dolphin Action Plan' drawn under NGRBA, a project for educating school children and communities on dolphin conservation was taken up during 2010-12 at 20 dolphin-sighted locations at a cost of Rs. 36.5 lakhs. Another project at a cost of ₹ 128 lakhs has been taken up for 2014-16, to address the threat to Gangetic Dolphin from the use of chemical fertilizers for agriculture along Ganga river basin, use of monofilament nylon nets and exploitation of small fish resulting in prey base depletion for Gangetic Dolphin and other educational activities. During 2014, Dolphin Action Plan was reviewed with experts, States etc. to identify various short and long term measures. Conservation of Aquatic Life is one of the identified activities under the Namami Gange programme.

(c) and (d) As per the Dolphin Action Plan, the Gangetic Dolphin is distributed in the Gangetic-Brammaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems of India, Nepal and Bangladesh. The total population is estimated to be between 2500 and 3000 individuals in its entire distribution range, out of which more than 80% is within the Indian territory.

**Extraction of Ground Water**

143. SHRI AVINASH RAI KHANNA: Will the Minister of WATER RESOURCES, RIVER DEVELOPMENT AND GANGA REJUVENATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government proposes to set up a central ground water level authority to check rampant extraction of ground water in various States;