

The First White Dolphin Reserve

Hwang-Jaw Lee, PhD
Board Director, Taiwan Flowers Development Association

Taiwan will establish its first marine wildlife sanctuary to protect the Chinese white dolphin, or *Sousa chinensis*. This was announced last April 21 by the Forestry Bureau under the ROC Council of Agriculture (COA).

The reserve is expected to be established in 763 square kilometers of ocean between Longfeng fishing port in Miaoli County, central Taiwan, and Waisanding Sand Bar Lighthouse in Chiayi County to the south. This will place a reasonable restriction on coastal development and fishing operations. It can also give appropriate protection to the intertidal zone and help nurture local fish stocks, benefitting dolphins and local fishermen.

The Chinese white dolphin's range stretches from the south of the Yangtze in mainland China to the east coast of Africa, including seas off Australia's north coast and Taiwan's west coast, the bureau said. Due to human disturbance through overfishing, underwater noise, water pollution and environmental degradation, the population of the cetacean has already been reduced to about 100.

In 2008, the COA declared the Chinese white dolphin to be an endangered species, and in June 2009 set up a task force seeking to reverse the situation. In September 2010, the COA passed a plan to protect the cetaceans, which called for the establishment of a marine sanctuary, long-term monitoring of the dolphin population, reduction of human interference and strengthening environmental education.

Since 2008, the COA has continued to enlist the aid of experts in investigating the environment, monitoring the dolphins and evaluating hotspots to create a database, study the effects of underwater noise pollution on the animals and determine the most suitable location for a wildlife sanctuary.

The area set aside for the reserve is extensive, the bureau said, and will impact the activities of fishermen. In the past year, the bureau has consulted with local fishermen, fishing industry representatives, Taiwan Power Co. and Hsinchu City-based Industrial Technology Research Institute, resulting in local fishermen saying they would help in monitoring and patrols.

Trawlers of under 50 tons would not be allowed to operate within 3 nautical miles of the coast in the reserve, as their nets catch all fish indiscriminately, leaving the dolphins with nothing to eat, the bureau said. Other fishing vessels will be allowed to work in the area.

Official announcement of the white dolphin sanctuary will be made in a month, the bureau said.

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