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Top marine mammal experts are meeting in Townsville today and tomorrow discuss the protection of Australia's only endemic dolphin species - the snubfin dolphin - which faces unprecedented threats to its survival from coastal development, boat strikes and fishing.

"Snubfin dolphin populations are small and isolated, making them particularly vulnerable to site-specific threats like port developments, increased boating activity and fishing nets," said Lydia Gibson, WWF's Tropical Marine Species Manager.

The Townsville meeting has been organised by the Australian Department of Environment (DEWHA) in order to gather the latest knowledge on the snubfin and the threats it faces.

"These animals are right on the edge. The loss of just two or three dolphins off Townsville in one year, for example, could trigger the extinction of this local population."

Dolphin sanctuaries and 'go slow' zones for recreational boaters in critical habitat areas, funding for extra Indigenous sea rangers and a more strategic approach to coastal development are among the measures WWF is putting forward to ensure the survival of these rare marine mammals.

"It's no secret that coastal development along the Queensland coast and across tropical Australia is accelerating at a very rapid pace. Without designated sanctuaries and a strategic approach to development we stand a very real risk of losing these unique animals," Ms Gibson said.

Large-scale LNG developments proposed for Gladstone, plans to expand Townsville Port and oil and gas expansion in Australia's North West, alongside interactions with fisheries, are all threatening the critical habitats of these rare dolphins.

WWF-Australia, with support from ING DIRECT, has been working to gather information about snubfin dolphins. This information will help determine the conservation actions required to protect this species.

"The recent likely extinction of the Yangtze river dolphin is a stark reminder of the need to protect inshore dolphins," Ms Gibson said.

"It is vital we lead the way and take decisive action to ensure our only endemic dolphin does not suffer the same fate."

More information

Charlie Stevens, WWF Media Manager - Queensland, 0424 649 689, 07 3003 1482

Lydia Gibson, WWF Tropical Marine Species Manager, 0406 382 498

For more information

Contact the WWF-Australia Press Office by email or phone on 1800 032 551, or 0410 220 608 after hours.

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