



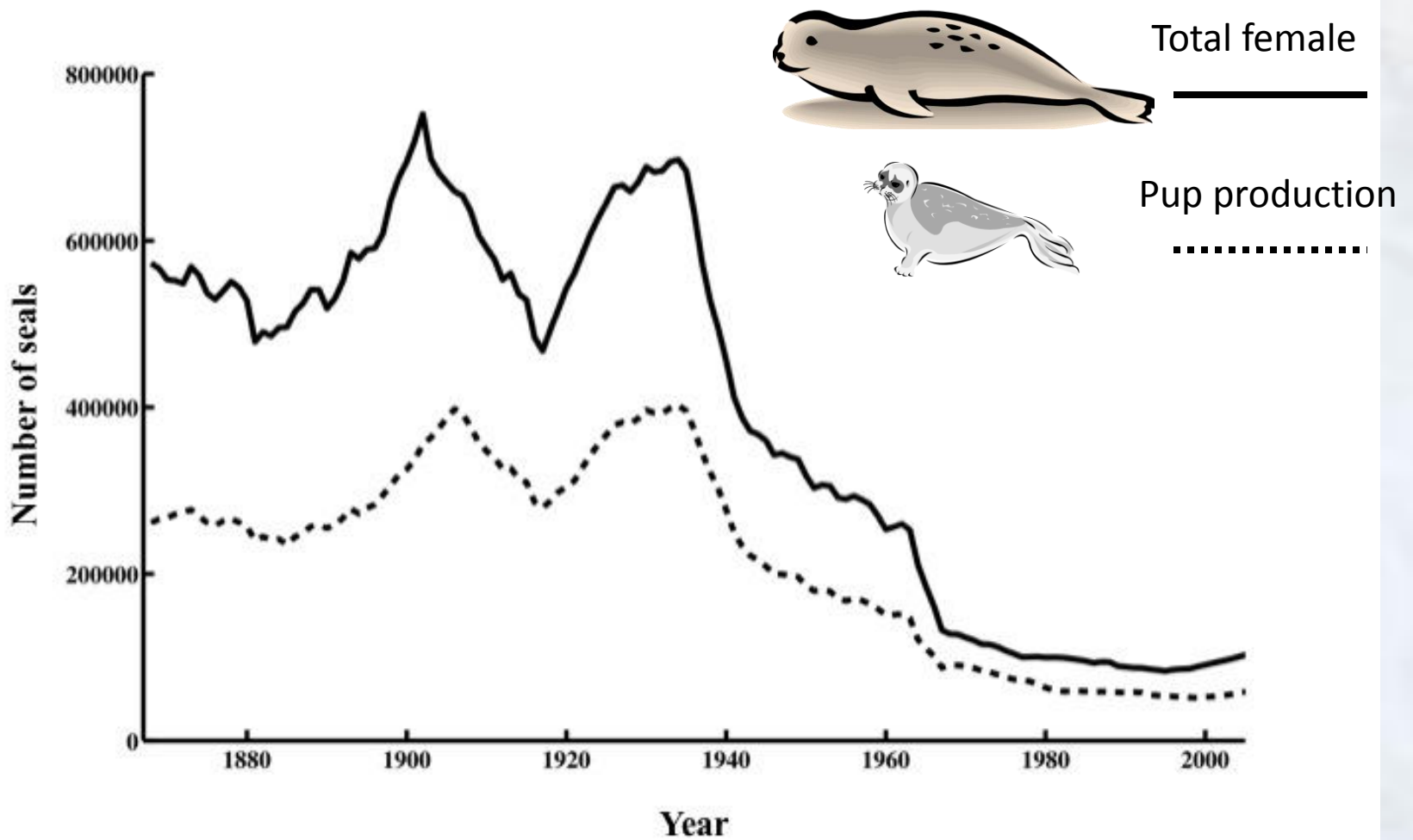
Caspian seal conservation

progress report

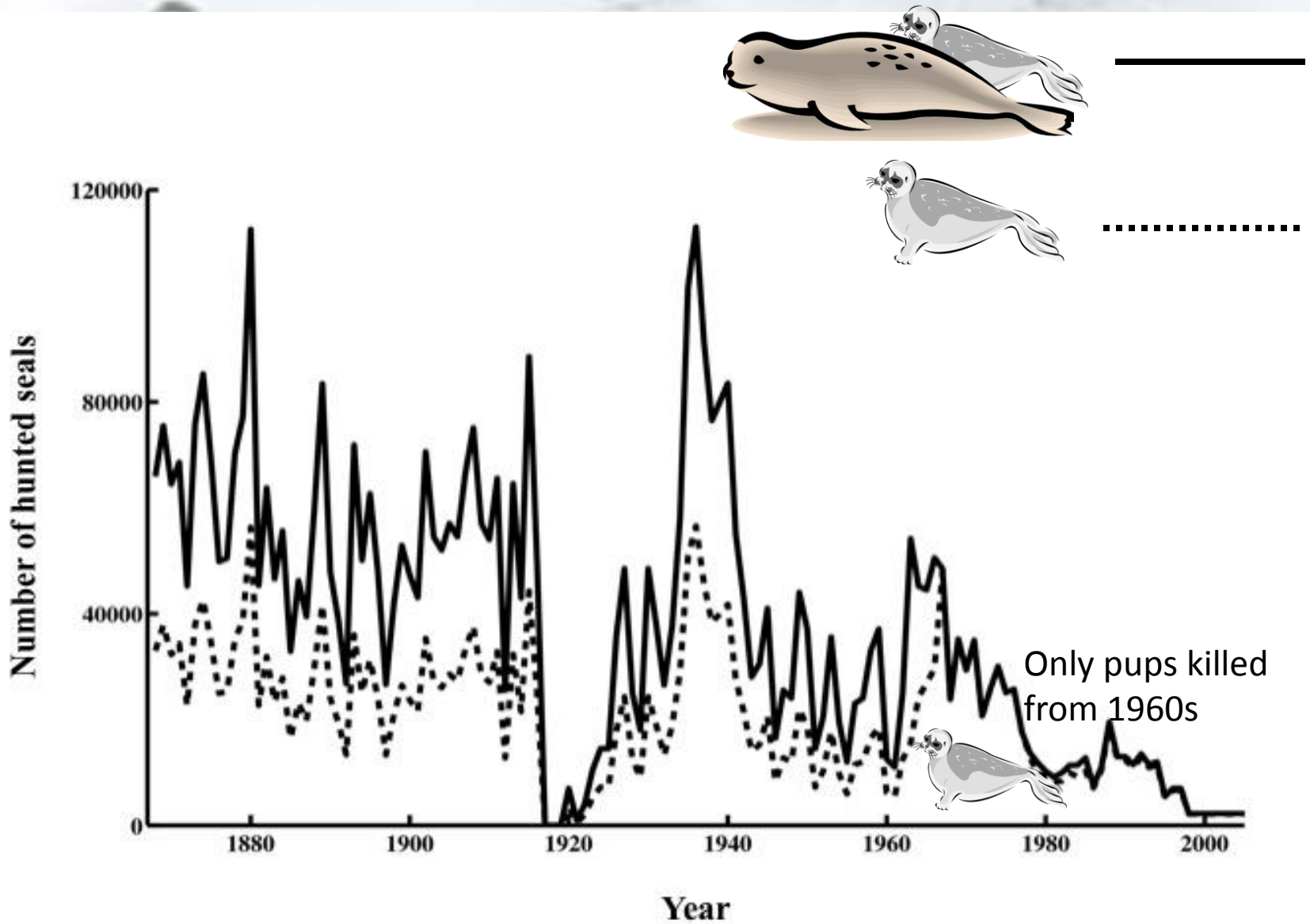
Caspian Environment Programme
Steering Committee meeting
Almaty, September 14 2010

The Caspian seal, *Phoca caspica*, is an iconic, flagship species
For the Caspian Sea





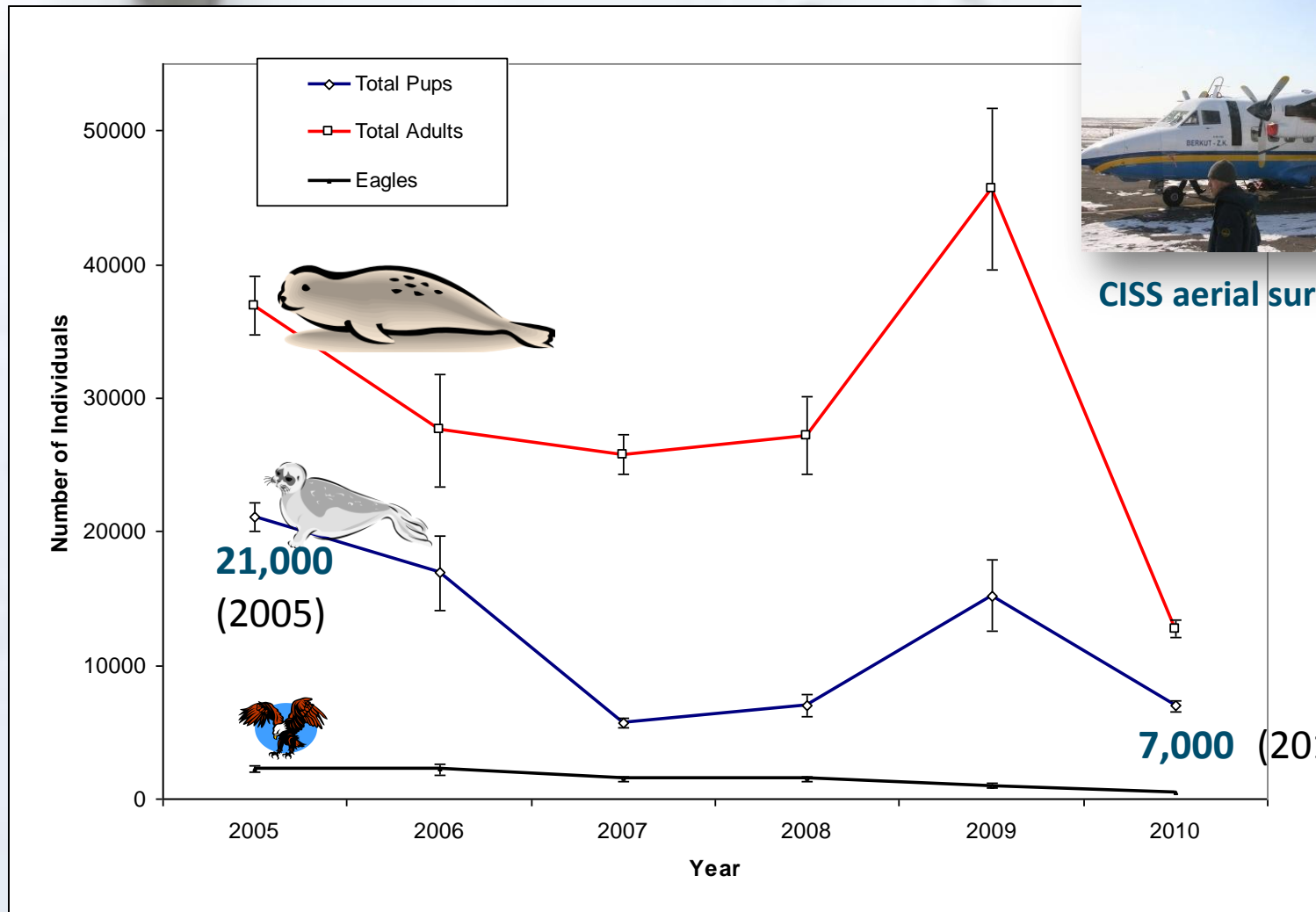
The species population size has dropped dramatically over the past 150 years



This has been mainly due to unsustainable commercial hunting

The decline continues today

IUCN : from
'Vulnerable to 'Endangered'
October 2008



CISS aerial survey 2005 –

Härkönen T, Jüssi M, Baimukanov M, Bignert A, Dmitrieva L, Kasimbekov Y, Verevkin M, Wilson S and Goodman SJ (2008) Pup production and breeding distribution of the Caspian seal (*Phoca caspica*) in relation to human impacts. *Ambio* 37(5): 356–361.

This decline is continuing NOW, mainly due to

- hunting



CAB quotas of 18,000

Incidental take in fisheries

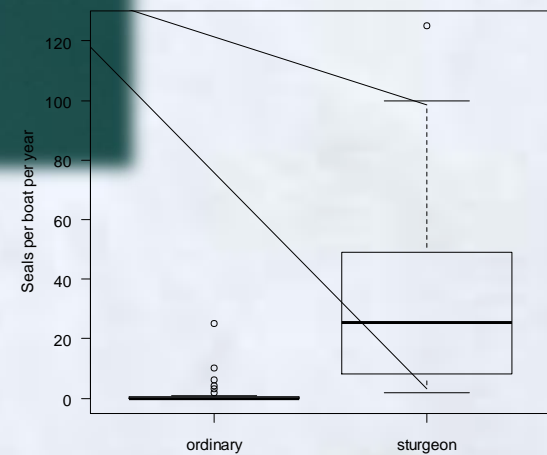


Estimated >10,000 in illegal sturgeon fishery in north Caspian



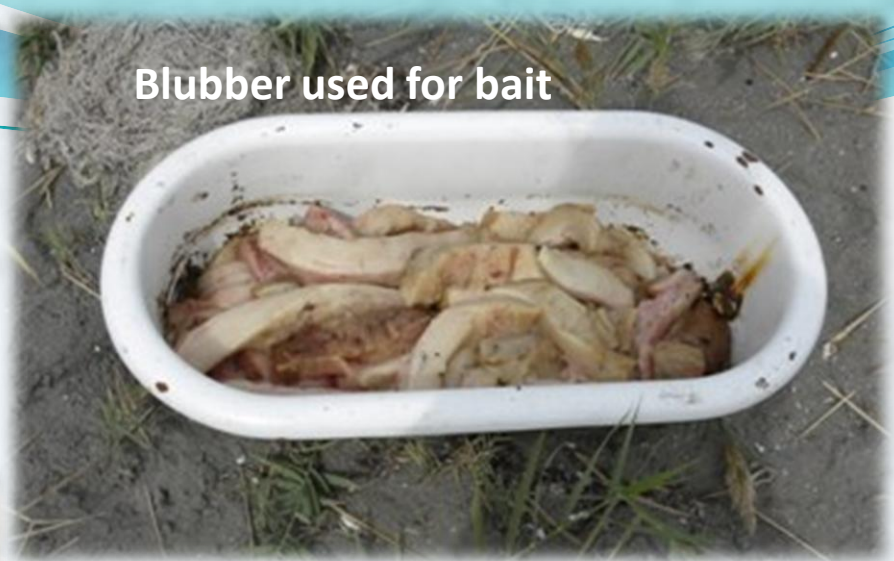
Seals are caught mostly in sturgeon nets of 100–125mm mesh

Photo: Agip KCO





Oil – \$14 per litre in market



Blubber used for bait

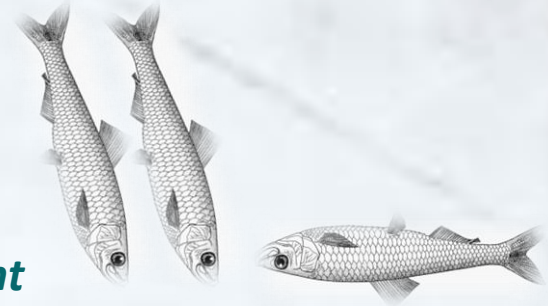


up to \$100 per skin

Other anthropogenic threats include :

Collapse in fish stocks due to overfishing, river damming and *Mnemiopsis* invasion.

This should be being addressed by the fisheries component of Caspeco



Habitat loss and incidental mortality due to local poaching and disturbance as well as industrial & recreational developments .



This should be being addressed by the SSPA network component of Caspeco

**Habitat loss due to
disturbance & poaching
at haul-out sites.....**



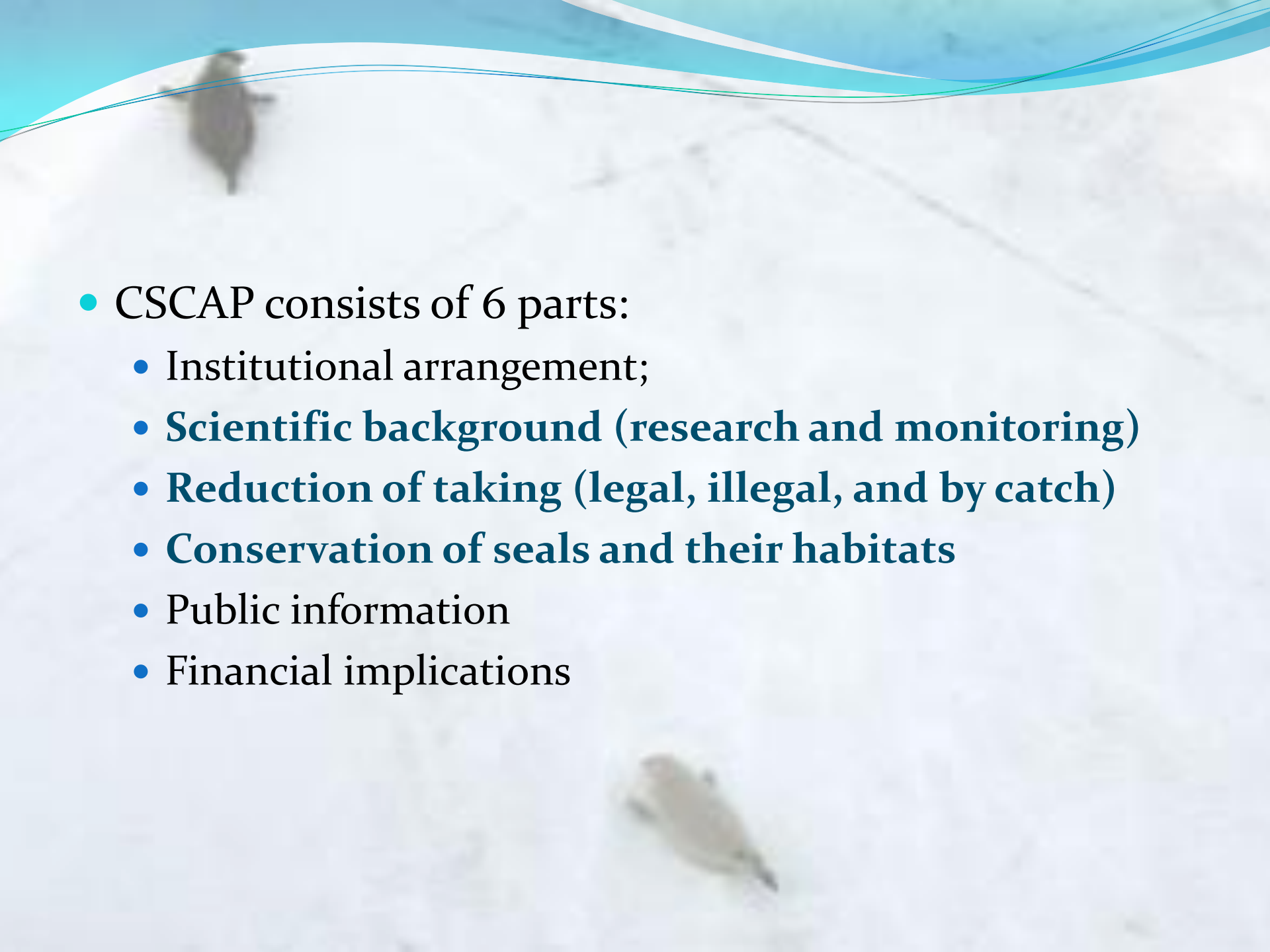


O&G development near
Critical moulting habitat
In Komsomolets Bay








Disturbance of ice-breeding habitat by industrial shipping



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- CSCAP consists of 6 parts:
 - Institutional arrangement;
 - **Scientific background (research and monitoring)**
 - **Reduction of taking (legal, illegal, and by catch)**
 - **Conservation of seals and their habitats**
 - Public information
 - Financial implications

Scientific background (research and monitoring)

To carry out a full annual survey on the entire winter ice-field of pups and adult seals	 CISS annual survey
To carry out counts at seal haul-out sites in non-iced areas of the Caspian, simultaneously with the annual February survey and at other seasons	 Darwin 2006–09; CISS
To describe, investigate and analyze all causes of mortality	 Ecotox, CISS & Darwin
To investigate Caspian seal migration patterns, ice-breeding habitat selection and foraging locations using telemetry systems	 CISS
To investigate Caspian seal genetic diversity	 CISS & Darwin

Reduction of taking of (legal, illegal, and by-catch

<p>RSC should prepare recommendations for Commission for Aquatic Bioresources of the Caspian Sea for all kinds of seal taking (commercial and scientific).</p>	<p>✓ CISS & CEP</p>
<p>RSC to develop modern, non-lethal research methodologies for the Caspian basin</p>	<p>✓ CISS & Darwin</p>

CONSERVATION & SUSTAINABLE USE OF THE CASPIAN SEAL POPULATION

The case for a zero hunting quota



2008

Legal hunting of Caspian seals 2004-

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Pup production	-	21,063	16,918	5,667	6,838	11,754
Quota*	18,000?	18,000?	18,000	18,000	18,000	20,000 (8,080 RF)
Hunt*	4,614	??	3,746	90	??	??

* Figures from Caspian Bioresources Commission (CAB)

Legal hunting quotas exceed annual pup production in most years. Even low levels of hunting, and other sources of mortality such as fishing by-catch will continue to drive the population in steep decline

For Caspeco to be effective, it is essential that CAB decisions and the basis for them should become transparent and accessible

Conservation of seals and their habitats

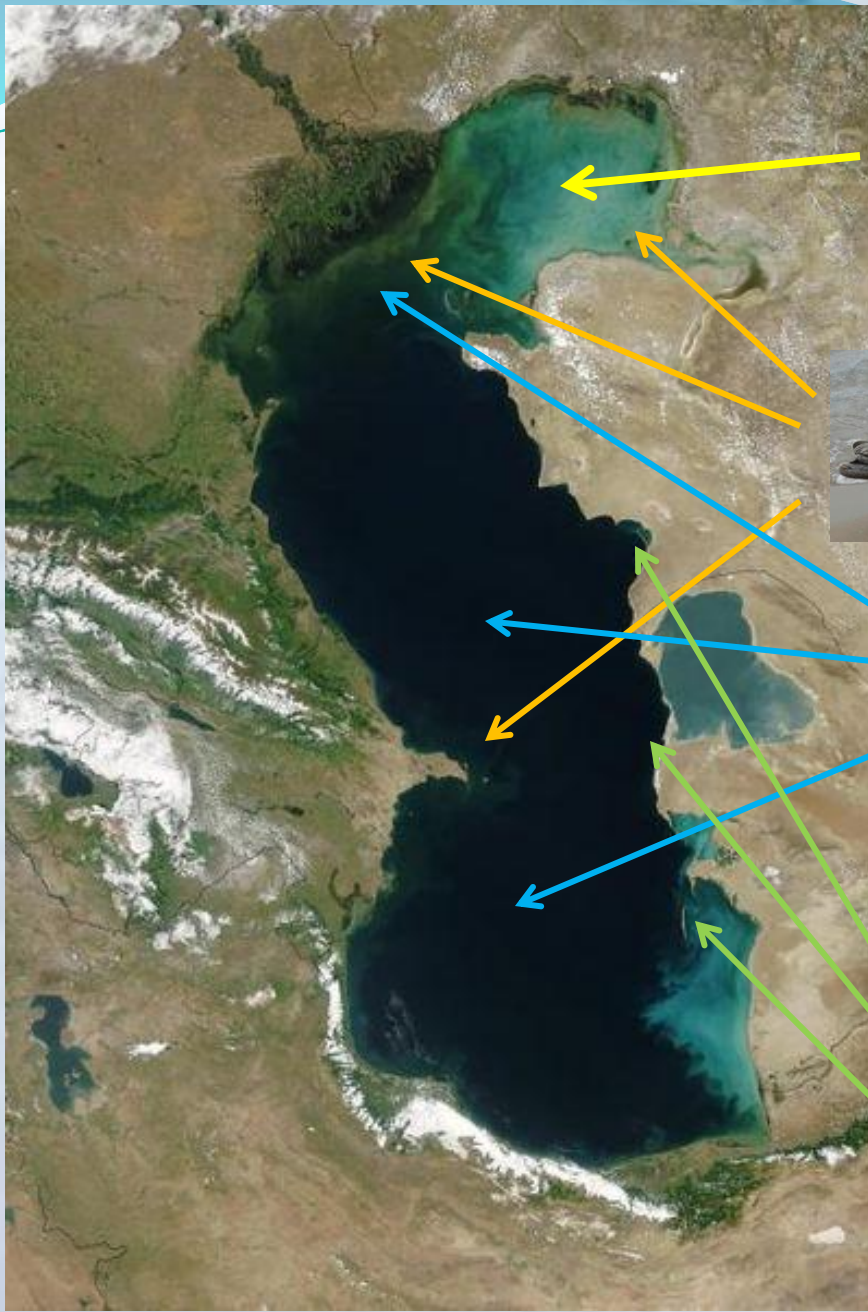
To take appropriate measures for the protection of key habitats and for ensuring the preservation of areas which are essential to the maintenance of the vital biological functions of seals.	Protected area project ‘Caspeco’ no documented progress so far
To preserve habitats and seals, within and outside protected areas, from undue disturbance or changes resulting, directly or indirectly, from human activities.	Protected area project ‘Caspeco’ no documented progress so far
To identify areas of degraded seal habitat and explore possibilities for restoring such habitat or creating new habitat to compensate for losses.	Some areas identified (CISS & Darwin; Caspeco concept paper) Restoring/creating habitat (Caspeco)
Prevention of illegal hunting	no documented progress so far
To reduce disturbance by ice-breakers and other shipping	Mitigation measures proposed (CISS and Agip KCO)

Caspeco plan for Special Protected Areas for seals (SSPAs)

Astana, March 2010



SELECTION OF PILOT SITES AND DEVELOPMENT OF TORs



breeding



moulting



Foraging at sea



Resting on shore



In summary:

The international scientists (CISS, CEP), companies and funding bodies (Agip KCO, UK Darwin Initiative, World Bank, GEF) have been and continue to support and promote Caspian seal conservation.

The international CISS and Darwin teams continue to act as the RSC

BUT

Very little progress seems to have been made so far on participation in conservation effort by regional authorities



IMMEDIATE STEPS for the REGION Which MUST be taken to **Save the Caspian seal**

- **Develop communication lines between CAB, RSC and Caspeco**
- **Adopt a regional zero legal hunting quota for the foreseeable future**
- **Close the sealskin factories in Dagestan**
- **Prohibit trade in seal products in local markets**

- **Prevent illegal sturgeon fishing**
- **Make large-mesh (<100mm) monofilament nets unavailable throughout region**

- **Develop alternative sustainable livelihoods in fishing communities**

- **Restore Caspian fish stocks by regulating take and creating no-take zones**

- **Develop and implement Seal Protected Areas during life of Caspeco project**

Is this the only future for Caspian seal pups?



**Nothing will change without
REGIONAL AUTHORITY**

ACTION

We are indebted to all our colleagues in the Caspian Environment Programme, Caspian International Seal Survey (CISS) team, Agip KCO and all our partner Institutes in the Darwin Initiative Project



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