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For Immediate Release:

## Thousands join first 22-hour webinar to support migratory fish global conservation initiatives

*Worldwide - May 15, 2020*

The World Fish Migration Foundation hosted the first-ever Global Swimways Webinar Marathon on May 14, 2020. The webinar brought together freshwater experts from around the world to share about their local swimways and migratory fish populations. All 50 speakers voiced the urgent need for more conservation measures to revive dwindling fish populations.

The first webinar of its kind lasted for nearly 24 hours on May 14, 2020. The online event brought together freshwater experts from around the world from Australia to Zambia and ending in Hawaii to learn from their experiences and inspire the audience to restore and protect rivers. Over 2,000 people from universities, governmental institutions, non-governmental organizations, policymakers, businesses, and public servants attended the webinar. Collectively, the speakers spread the pressing message: migratory fish populations are declining, and there is a need for urgent action to protect swimways—for the benefit of migratory fish and people.

Arjan Berkhuisen, the **Managing Director of the World Fish Migration Foundation**, attended all 22 hours of the webinar. He says, "Over 22 hours, I heard from people all over the world, who are doing their utmost to make the world a better place for migratory fish and, in the end, for us all. There were stories of decline and disaster, but also so many stories of hope and restoration. There are thousands of people asking global policymakers to include life underwater when making future plans. It's time we are heard, and I'm glad we can support this by bringing people along global swimways together."

Migratory fish are essential to maintain the healthy functioning of rivers, feed billions of people worldwide and contribute billions of dollars annually to recreational and commercial fisheries. However, over the last several decades, river fragmentation and overharvesting have contributed significantly to the steep decline of migratory fish populations, globally. Later this year, the Living Planet Index report on migratory fish will be released indicating the extent of impact to populations over time.

"Migratory fish are critical for the food security of vulnerable communities across the world, providing protein for hundreds of millions of people, but they are invariably ignored when decisions are made about the future of their rivers," said **Stuart Orr, WWF Global Freshwater Lead**. "This incredible event has helped to shine a spotlight on these extraordinary species and why the world needs to start valuing rivers - for the sake of migratory fish and people."

Freshwater systems often receive little attention and inadequate regulations in national or international policies to safeguard their health. Now, only one-third of the largest rivers are free-flowing. Now is the time to take action to protect these species and their swimways. Globally, many organizations, researchers, and other entities are taking the initiative to restore their waterways. One important measure is mentioned throughout the webinar is to reconnect rivers to allow fish migration and optimal river functioning.

Dr Gordon O'Brien, **aquatic ecologist from the University of Mpumalanga**, a speaker during the African session, remarked, "This webinar is the first time stakeholders of migratory fish in Africa have come together from across the continent to represent almost all of the continent to talk about migratory fish that move across Africa. With this start, we hope to be able to think, talk and act on issues that affect these fishes, their ecosystems and vulnerable African people who depend on them. As a start, we need not only to react and continue to work on issues affecting migratory fishes but to be pro-active and find populations of important species that have intact migrations and preserve them!"

Derek Dzousa from the **Mahseer Trust & All India Game Fishing Association** spoke at the central and south Asia session, and he says, "What can we do to save our fish? We have to work with together to create a holistic approach and raise awareness about their value to our societies. This webinar was a great way to get started on this work."

Nearly all attendees joined more than one session of the webinar. One spectator who attended all but two of the sessions said, "This was a fantastic and most worthwhile endeavor. Well done all, I truly appreciate the opportunity you provided to help get a glimpse of restoration efforts worldwide."

The Foundation hopes the Global Swimways Webinar Marathon inspired more people into action to support the restoration of swimways and subsequently migratory fish populations. This includes taking part in the next World Fish Migration Day on October 24, 2020. It is expected that over 3000 organizations will participate, more rivers will be opened up, and migratory fish related issues will be addressed in future policies.

### **Notes to the editor**

Link to the webinar program and available presentations:

<https://www.worldfishmigrationfoundation.com/global-swimways-webinar-marathon/>

General link: [www.worldfishmigrationfoundation.com](http://www.worldfishmigrationfoundation.com)

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