

January 15, 2015

Lic. Enrique Peña Nieto
Presidente Constitucional delos Estados Unidos Mexicanos

Lic. Enrique Martínez y Martínez
Secretario de Agricultura, Ganadería, Desarrollo Rural, Pesca y Alimentación

Estimados Lic. Peña Nieto y Lic. Martínez y Martínez,

On behalf of the Marine and the Latin America and Caribbean Sections of the Society for Conservation Biology (SCB), we write to express our support for the recently announced ban of gillnets to combat the continued decline of the critically endangered vaquita. Lack of suitable action of the responsible Mexican Government agencies was pushing the vaquita to extinction. We thus welcome this new effort that will greatly improve the chances of survival for this distinct and uniquely Mexican species.

The recent proposal is largely in line with the recommendations made in the report of the fifth meeting of the Comité Internacional para la Recuperación de la Vaquita (CIRVA). However, it does not include fishermen from Puerto Peñasco in the proposed restrictions, which we strongly recommend. The success of the proposed gillnet ban will depend not only on its duration, with a longer period being more likely to succeed, but also heavily upon the effective enforcement of its provisions, both on and off the water. To date, enforcement has been insufficient, with both extensive fishing activity within the Refuge (see photographs at <http://www.iucn-csg.org/index.php/2014/12/07/new-evidence-that-mexican-authorities-are-not-adequately-enforcing-fishing-regulations-to-protect-vaquitas/>) and the persistence of illegal fishing of totoaba (which is itself an endangered species) throughout the region (as illustrated by the confiscation of hundreds of illegal totoaba swim bladders in Mexico City). Therefore, we strongly urge you to increase enforcement efforts to ensure success.

To successfully resolve the long-term crisis for the vaquita a sustained, coordinated effort leading to implementation measures with relatively low social impact is needed. For example, retraining schemes have been effective elsewhere in the world as a longer-term solution to conservation issues. We would gladly contribute expertise in these areas to help resolve this situation for the benefit of all involved. Additionally, we are aware that the Mexico Senate passed a Point of Agreement on 28 November 2014 stating that additional



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surveys are also to be carried out. We believe efforts should be focused on law enforcement and reducing the economic impact on the affected fishers and other stakeholders. However, if such surveys are to take place, it is important for an independent panel of scientists with the appropriate expertise to assess their design and potential efficacy. Once again, we offer our expertise, should it be required.

SCB is an international professional organization whose mission is to advance the science and practice of conserving the Earth's biological diversity, support the dissemination of conservation science, and increase the application of science to management and policy. Numbering in the thousands worldwide, the Society's membership comprises of a wide range of people interested in the conservation and study of biological ecosystems, including but not limited to, resource managers, educators, government and private conservation workers, and students. SCB, through its membership, is capable of engaging diverse constituents and providing many resources necessary for a positive change towards sustainability, from developing new applied methods and techniques for conservation, to advocacy efforts, to science and conservation education.

Sincerely,

Rurik List, PhD,

President, Latin America and Caribbean Section, Society for Conservation Biology

John A. Cigliano, PhD,

President, Marine Section, Society for Conservation Biology

Co-Chair & Scientific Program Chair, 3rd International Marine Conservation Congress



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CC:

Ing. Juan José Guerra Abud
Secretario de Medio Ambiente y Recursos
Naturales
c.secretario@semarnat.gob.mx
juanjoseguerra@semarnat.gob.mx
Blvd. Adolfo Ruiz Cortines # 4209
Jardines de la Montaña, Tlalpan,
México, D.F. 14210
México

Sr. Rafael Pacchiano Alaman
Subsecretario de Gestión para la Protección
Ambiental
rafael.pacchiano@semarnat.gob.mx
Av. Revolución 1425,
Col. Tlacopac San Angel,
Alvaro Obregon,
Distrito Federal,
México, C.P. 1040

Sra. Senadora Ninfa Salinas Sada
Presidenta de la Comisión de Medio
Ambiente, Recursos Naturales y Pesca
Cámara de Senadores
ninfa.salinas@congreso.gob.mx
Senado de la República
Centro Histórico Ciudad de México,
México, D.F. 06010
México

Sra. Diputada Lourdes Adreiana Moreno
López
Presidenta de la Comisión de Medio Ambiente
Cámara de Diputados
lulu.lopez@congreso.gob.mx
Palacio Legislativo de San Lázaro E. "F", 3° P,
Av. Congreso de la Unión #66, Col. El Parque,
México D.F., 15969
México

M. en C. Luis Fueyo MacDonald
Comisionado Nacional de Áreas Naturales
Protegidas (CONANP)
lfueyo@conanp.gob.mx,
comisionado@conanp.gob.mx
Camino al Ajusco 200 Col. Jardines de la
Montaña
Delegación Tlalpan
México, D.F. 14210
México

Lic. Mario Aguilar Sanchez
Comisionado Nacional de la CONAPESCA
mario.aguilar@conapesca.gob.mx
Av. Camarón Sábalo S/B Esq. con Tiburón
Frac. Sábalo Country Club
82100 – Mazatlan, Sin.
Mexico