

August 22, 2014

The President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

The report of the fifth meeting of the Comité Internacional para la Recuperación de la Vaquita (CIRVA V) put forth strong recommendations that, if heeded, will give the greatest chance of recovery for the critically endangered vaquita, a small porpoise found only in the northern waters of the Gulf of California. The CIRVA V report makes clear that with fewer than 100 individuals remaining, declining at 25%/year, time is indeed running out. This recovery is not Mexico's responsibility alone, in fact coordinated work on the part of the Mexican government with the governments of China and the United States will be required if the recommendations are to be fully and successfully implemented.

Representing numerous US-based non-governmental organizations that share a common mission for ocean stewardship and conservation, we implore you to work with these nations to support the implementation of the recommended actions of CIRVA V, and to do so expeditiously.

The cause of the decline of the vaquita is clear: accidental drowning in gillnet fisheries. While conservation plans substituting gillnet fisheries with vaquita-safe gear are underway, time for gradual replacement has been stolen by resurgence of an illegal fishery for the endangered totoaba. Totoaba swim bladders are sold in Asia, involving the United States as part of the distribution chain. In addition, seafood from legal Gulf gillnet fisheries, including shrimp, are sold in the United States.

The United States has taken a strong leadership role on illegal fishing and wildlife trafficking through your Executive Order on Combating Wildlife Trafficking and the Memorandum on a Comprehensive Framework to Combat Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing and Seafood Fraud, as well as Secretary John Kerry's State Department Ocean Conference. We hope that the United States will continue this strong leadership.

**Key recommendations from the CIRVA V report:**

- CIRVA **strongly recommends** that the Government of Mexico enact emergency regulations establishing a gillnet exclusion zone covering the full range of the vaquita - not simply the existing Refuge, starting in September 2014.

- CIRVA **recommends** that the Government of Mexico provide sufficient enforcement to ensure that gillnet fishing is eliminated within the exclusion zone using all available enforcement tools, both within and outside Mexico to stop illegal fishing, especially the capture of totoabas and the trade in their products.

The vaquita occupies a discrete region of the Mexican waters, yet it is an international treasure. It is also the world's most endangered marine mammal. Without action, the vaquita will likely join the Yangtze River dolphin as the second marine mammal to be lost to extinction this century, and this may occur within four short years.

We, the undersigned, urge the government of the United States to assist the Mexican and Chinese governments to the greatest extent possible in support of the recommendations of CIRVA V.

Signed,

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