



José Eduardo Calzada Rovirosa

Minister of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food
Av. Municipio Libre 377
Col. Santa Cruz Atoyac
Del. Benito Juárez
Ciudad de México
03310 México

13th June 2017

Dear Minister,

The European Cetacean Society (ECS) is a scientific body that aims to promote and advance the science and conservation efforts of marine mammals. I am writing to you on behalf of the members of ECS, who are gravely concerned about the dire state of the vaquita today a matter which was discussed at our recent annual conference. Despite conservation efforts, the population has continued to decline and experts estimate there are less than 30 vaquitas left in the wild.

As you know the vaquitas live in only one place in the world, the Northern Gulf of California. In this area fishing has traditionally provided livelihoods for many communities, but in recent years, the increase in illegal fishing, especially for the totoaba, has had a detrimental effect on the vaquita population that are caught in the illegal gillnets and drown. We strongly support the recent extension of the ban on gill netting and encourage you to take all necessary actions to make this effective. It is imperative that gillnetting in the area is brought to a complete stop, if we are to stop the demise of this species. There is a consensus in the international scientific community that incidental mortality is the risk factor that will drive the vaquita to extinction probably by next year, if this risk factor is not fully eliminated now. In the meantime, we support the initiatives by the Consortium for Vaquita Conservation, Protection, and Rescue (VaquitaCPR) - with respect to capture and hold vaquitas in captivity until it is safe to reintroduce them to Baja California.

Together with the hundreds of members of the European Cetacean Society, we call on you to exercise your powers and take urgent action now to:

- *Make fully effective the ban on the use, possession and sale of entangling and gill nets in the Northern Gulf of California;*
- *Fully support the vaquitaCPR program;*
- *Increase interaction between front-line law enforcement and intelligence agencies to eliminate illegal fishing in the area, taking advantage of the recent amendments to the Mexican criminal code by establishing stronger penalties for totoaba fishing and trafficking;*
- *Crack down on the selling of illegally caught totoaba swim bladder from Mexico to Hong Kong and China through the US border, and other routes, to black markets in those countries;*
- *Support local fishing communities to manage their fisheries sustainably; and*
- *Allow fishing gear experts, to work alongside the relevant national fisheries authorities, and local fishermen in the design and the adoption of alternative fishing gear.*



We recognise your efforts in this very difficult and urgent issue and we sincerely hope that you will now take every action to ensure the survival of this iconic and special cetacean, endemic to Mexican waters. Crucially we stress the importance of making the ban on gillnets fully effective whilst at the same time supporting sustainable alternatives to illegal fishing in the region.

On behalf of ECS I wish you sincere luck with your effort in saving the vaquita from extinction.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Mario Acquarone

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