

SC/69B/O/01

Sub-committees/working group name: O

Extinction Alert: Summary Evaluation

M. Simmonds, M. Stachowitsch, K. Wilson



INTERNATIONAL
WHALING COMMISSION

Papers submitted to the IWC are produced to advance discussions within that meeting; they may be preliminary or exploratory.

It is important that if you wish to cite this paper outside the context of an IWC meeting, you notify the author at least six weeks before it is cited to ensure that it has not been superseded or found to contain errors.

Extinction Alert: Summary Evaluation

M. Simmonds, M. Stachowitsch, K. Wilson

Background

A new mechanism enabling the Scientific Committee to alert the media and public to specific extinction risks was endorsed by the Commission in 2022. The first IWC Scientific Committee Extinction Alert was published on 07 August 2023.

No dedicated resources were allocated to this initiative, and help to maximise outreach/impact was sought from members of the Scientific Committee and their employing organisations.

One week before the publication date, SC members received an outreach pack containing the Evaluation Alert, a set of key messages, a suggested tweet with social media hashtags, a press release and high-resolution images/video. Some of the material was available in French, Spanish and Chinese (subject to availability of volunteer translators). Operating under an embargo until 07 August, SC members were asked to share it with their networks, colleagues and any other relevant contacts.

In addition, the press release and selected supporting material was sent by the Secretariat to a targeted media distribution list, including mainstream news media and science and conservation specialists in key stakeholder regions (Mexico, China and the US). A 'VIP' media list was also called directly to 'sell the story.'

All the outreach material was also available on a new, [dedicated page of the IWC website](#).

The social media efforts of the Secretariat were focused on the IWC Twitter/X platform, with LinkedIn used in Asia (see Lessons Learned).

Media Reach

Reports of and/or links to media coverage were provided by several members of the Scientific Committee in different parts of the world, including the key target region of Mexico, and a detailed report of German-speaking media coverage provided by a supporting NGO. At a global level, media monitoring was ad hoc: compiled by the Secretariat and reliant on free-to-use news monitoring services and third party reports, and therefore not comprehensive. Even so, we received reports of coverage in broadcast, print, digital and social media from 15 countries as well as in media covering wider regions such as Reuters and the Arabic News Network. A full report is annexed.

Broadcast coverage included BBC TV World News, BBC World Service Radio, CNN, Euronews, CBC (Canada) and NBC18 (India). Print coverage included articles in India Today, the Guardian (UK), Washington Times. This included some substantial news 'packages' and interviews with the Scientific Committee's Vice-chair.

Specialist trade and consumer media also covered the Extinction Alert, including Seafood Source and a number of conservation-focused titles.

The IWC website recorded an increase in individual users of 114% on 07 August (compared with the previous month and noting that August is usually a quiet period).

The IWC's post on Twitter/X registered 6402 impressions (views) in the 48 hours after publication.

Impact

To help us understand whether the Alert had reached relevant decision-makers and policy influencers, we surveyed the 280 members of the Scientific Committee with whom the Alert had of course originated and whose help had been sought to maximise awareness of the initiative. This community includes government employees and advisors as well as scientists affiliated to universities, NGOs and other IGOs.

Impact is not easy to judge but some of those surveyed did report discussions prompted by the alert and the consensus was that the amount of media coverage must have increased awareness of the plight of the vaquita, but it's very difficult and too early to judge whether this awareness translates into any kind of changes to policy or approach amongst key stakeholders.

One encouraging fact is that Mexico topped the list of countries viewing the IWC website on 07 August for the first time.

Lessons Learned

More precise planning and consideration of time zones and languages would have made it easier to organise interviews and easier on interviewees.

Twitter is the only social media platform currently endorsed for use by the IWC but third party LinkedIn accounts had to be used in SE Asia where Twitter is not widespread.

One important question raised in the survey was whether the vaquita alert was too late to be useful?

Conclusions and Future Prospects

The Scientific Committee needs to take a view on whether the EA was adequately successful and, if it believes it was, whether it wishes to repeat the exercise for other species/populations.

The EA can probably be judged as successful in terms of the number of 'media hits' and clearly reached a very large audience. Whether it had any real impact at a policy level is less clear and may only become fully apparent over time.

Another consideration is the apparently low engagement level of the SC members themselves, which if an accurate gauge, seems to indicate only a very low level of action from individuals. It may be that SC members judged that the Alert would be taken forward by the Secretariat and those few members of the committee actively engaged in managing it.

If the SC does want to repeat this exercise then it also needs to decide how to identify which taxa to bring forward next.

The next Extinction Alert will not be able to carry the message that this is the ‘first time that the IWC has issued such a device’, which added significantly to the news value of the alert and was the angle used by many of the journalists who covered it. Promotion of another taxon in this way also needs to take into account whether an EA is appropriate scientifically and whether it can be expected to make a positive difference – for example will it inform policy makers who might not otherwise know the significance of the situation of the species/population.

We suggest that the Alert mechanism should be used sparingly and only where such criteria are met, as this will help to ensure that it is seen as something significant.

Annex: Media Coverage of Vaquita Extinction Alert from 7 August – 30 August 2023

Note: no formal media monitoring service was used so this compilation is not exhaustive and includes only coverage picked up by/passed on to the Secretariat from SC members, Google Alerts etc.

Social Media

IWC Tweet: 6402 impressions in first 48 hours

522 engagements (clicking links etc)

Website

Website use up 114% on previous month comparison (Mon 7 Aug v Mon 10 Jul).

Afternoon of 7 Aug is first time that Mexico topped list of countries currently viewing IWC website (based on IP addresses).

Broadcast/print media

BBC Radio World Service – Newshour (broadcast globally) (Tue 8/8)

[Newshour](#): interview with Lindsay - scroll to time 49.30)

BBC TV World News – news item (broadcast globally – interview download available from Secretariat)

CNN

<https://edition.cnn.com/2023/08/09/world/vaquita-porpoise-extinction-alert-scn/index.html>

Reuters

[https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/extinction-alert-issued-mexicos-threatened-vaquita-porpoise-2023-08-07/#:~:text=MEXICO%20CITY%2C%20Aug%207%20\(Reuters,institution's%20first%20Dever%20extinction%20warning.](https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/extinction-alert-issued-mexicos-threatened-vaquita-porpoise-2023-08-07/#:~:text=MEXICO%20CITY%2C%20Aug%207%20(Reuters,institution's%20first%20Dever%20extinction%20warning.)

<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/mexico-conservation-group-boost-efforts-save-tiny-vaquita-porpoise-2023-10-03/>

The Guardian Newspaper (UK)

[Extinction alert issued over critically endangered vaquita - The Guardian](#)

Euronews

<https://www.euronews.com/green/2023/08/08/vaquita-are-survivors-worlds-rarest-marine-mammal-clings-on-at-the-edge-of-extinction#:~:text=The%20International%20Whaling%20Commission%20has,care%3A%20the%20critically%20endangered%20vaquita.&text=Around%2010%20of%20the%20little,to%20a%20recent%20research%20expedition.>

Washington Times

<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/aug/10/vaquita-porpoise-faces-extinction-warns-whaling-gr/>

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

<https://www.cbc.ca/kidsnews/post/watch-the-worlds-smallest-porpoise-is-at-risk-of-extinction>

CNBC TV

<https://www.cnbctv18.com/environment/last-hope-for-vaquita-porpoise-iwc-issues-extinction-alert-for-endangered-species-17485191.htm>

WION (Subscription News)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FLCoVLg7RZA>

Nature World News

[Vaquita Porpoise: **International Whaling Commission** Issues Extinction Alert for World's ...](#)

Down to Earth

[Plight of the vaquita forces **International Whaling Commission** to issue first extinction alert](#)

Indo and NY

[Species protection: **whaling commission** warns of extinction of the vaquitas - indonewyork](#)

TAG 24

[Dolphin-like vaquita porpoise hovers on edge of extinction - TAG24](#)

Seafood Source

[International **Whaling** Commission issues extinction alert for vaquita porpoise](#)

<https://www.seafoodsource.com/news/supply-trade/us-customs-and-border-protection-seize-endangered-fish-products-worth-roughly-usd-1-million>

[Jerusalem Post](#)

<https://www.jpost.com/environment-and-climate-change/article-758355>

News5 (US)

<https://www.news5cleveland.com/the-vaquita-porpoise-nears-extinction-from-gillnet-entanglement>

The Inertia

<https://www.theinertia.com/news/vaquita-porpoises-are-under-an-official-extinction-alert/>

Causes

<https://www.causes.com/articles/55292-extinction-alert-issued-vaquita-porpoise>

Marine Mammal Society podcast

<https://marinemammalscience.org/podcast/extinction-alert-vaquita/>

Reuters piece picked up and reproduced in:

India Today

<https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/extinction-alert-issued-for-mexicos-threatened-vaquita-porpoise-2417720-2023-08-08>

Yahoo News

https://news.yahoo.com/extinction-alert-issued-mexicos-vaquita-085302916.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAlaFADjB3kGCUcOnDXNnPgacAZMJ5VscboOsz6BDnpywPmO52rSkdT4tL8Z9KXT5DOz7JB-pDKGos-D6k5R6tgmZgsZ3b5eO8Gqa5XKBubY3Hn1Pr6dLTFw5cHVCh7ICSRzvyR7ixXY_FRN7IDImQtVtXKJeLLfpaRhXtyxC0Q

Globe and Mail (Canada)

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/video-extinction-alert-issued-for-mexicos-vaquita-porpoise/>

Al Mayadeen (international Arabic channel)

<https://english.almayadeen.net/news/environment/extinction-alert-issued-over-critically-endangered-vaquita>

Rappler https://www.rappler.com/environment/nature/extinction-alert-mexico-threatened-vaquita-porpoise/?utm_source=ground.news&utm_medium=referral

The Star (Malaysia) https://www.thestar.com.my/news/world/2023/08/08/extinction-alert-issued-for-mexico039s-threatened-vaquita-porpoise?utm_source=ground.news&utm_medium=referral

WTVB (Michigan)

https://wtvbam.com/2023/08/07/extinction-alert-issued-for-mexicos-threatened-vaquita-porpoise/?utm_source=ground.news&utm_medium=referral

CNN piece reproduced in

<https://www.cbs58.com/news/international-whaling-commission-issues-its-first-ever-extinction-alert-over-endangered-vaquita-porpoise>

Spanish coverage

[Comisión Ballenera emite por la vaquita su primera “alerta de ...](#)



ejecentral.com.mx

[https://www.ejecentral.com.mx › comision-ballenera-e...](https://www.ejecentral.com.mx/comision-ballenera-e...)

hace 16 horas — Esta **“alerta de extinción”** es una iniciativa del comité científico de la CBI, formado por alrededor de 200 académicos, quienes llegaron “a la ...

[Posicionamiento de WWF acerca de la 'alerta de extinción' de ...](#)



wwf.org.mx

[https://www.wwf.org.mx › ...](https://www.wwf.org.mx/...)

hace 1 día — Posicionamiento de WWF acerca de la '**alerta de extinción**' de la **vaquita** emitida por la Comisión Ballenera Internacional. Posted on. 07 agosto ...

[Comisión Ballenera emite por la vaquita su primera “alerta de ...](#)



[ejecentral.com.mx](https://www.ejecentral.com.mx)

<https://www.ejecentral.com.mx> › [comision-ballenera-e...](#)

hace 16 horas — Esta “**alerta de extinción**” es una iniciativa del comité científico de la CBI, formado por alrededor de 200 académicos, quienes llegaron “a la ...

[Posicionamiento de WWF acerca de la 'alerta de extinción' de ...](#)



[wwf.org.mx](https://www.wwf.org.mx)

<https://www.wwf.org.mx> › ...

hace 1 día — Posicionamiento de WWF acerca de la '**alerta de extinción**' de la **vaquita** emitida

hace 1 día — La Comisión Ballenera Internacional (CBI) emitió una **alerta de extinción** sobre la **vaquita** marina, pequeña marsopa que sólo reside en el Alto ...

[Emiten alerta de extinción sobre vaquita marina - La Jornada](#)



[jornada.com.mx](https://www.jornada.com.mx)

<https://www.jornada.com.mx> › [2023/08/07](#) › [sociedad](#)

hace 1 día — La Comisión Ballenera Internacional (CBI) emitió una **alerta de extinción** sobre la **vaquita** marina, pequeña marsopa que sólo reside en el Alto ...



[reforma.com](https://www.reforma.com)

<https://www.reforma.com> › [Verde](#)

hace 1 día — La Comisión Ballenera Internacional emitió por primera vez en su historia una **alerta de extinción** por la situación de la **vaquita** marina.

[La Comisión Ballenera Internacional emite una alerta por ...](#)



[wired.com](#)

<https://es.wired.com> › Ciencia › Medio Ambiente

hace 2 horas — La Comisión Ballenera Internacional (**IWC**, por sus siglas en inglés) emitió una **alerta de extinción** de la **vaquita** marina.

[Peligro de extinción del mamífero marino más pequeño del ...](#)



[as.com](#)

<https://as.com> › Actualidad › Sociedad

hace 5 horas — La principal amenaza de la **vaquita** marina (*Phocoena sinus*) es su captura incidental en redes de enmalle utilizadas para pescar otra especie en ...

[Lanzan Alerta de Extinción internacional para salvar a la ...](#)



[observatorioenlinea.com.mx](#)

<https://observatorioenlinea.com.mx> › lanzan-alerta-de-...

hace 1 día — El sistema de **alertas** está dirigido por el Comité Científico del **IWC**, conformado por alrededor de 200 investigadores de todo el mundo.

[La Comisión Ballenera Internacional emite una alerta por ...](#)



[wired.com](#)

<https://es.wired.com> › Ciencia › Medio Ambiente

hace 2 horas — La Comisión Ballenera Internacional (**IWC**, por sus siglas en inglés) emitió una **alerta de extinción** de la **vaquita** marina.

[Peligro de extinción del mamífero marino más pequeño del ...](#)

as

[as.com](#)

<https://as.com> › [Actualidad](#) › [Sociedad](#)

hace 5 horas — La principal amenaza de la **vaquita** marina (*Phocoena sinus*) es su captura incidental en redes de enmalle utilizadas para pescar otra especie en ...

[Lanzan Alerta de Extinción internacional para salvar a la ...](#)

N

[observatorioenlinea.com.mx](#)

<https://observatorioenlinea.com.mx> › [lanzan-alerta-de-...](#)

hace 1 día — El sistema de **alertas** está dirigido por el Comité Científico del **IWC**, conformado por alrededor de 200 investigadores de todo el mundo.

German language media monitoring report provided by OceanCare

Die Zeit (Germany)

<https://www.zeit.de/wissen/umwelt/2023-08/internationale-walfangkommission-warnung-aussterben-vaquitas-schweinswal>

Spektrum der Wissenschaft (Germany)

<https://www.spektrum.de/news/internationale-walfangkommission-warnt-vor-aussterben-der-vaquitas/2167935>

SRF(Schwizer Radio und Fernsehen) (Switzerland)

<https://www.srf.ch/news/international/walkommission-warnt-erste-wal-art-vor-dem-aussterben-nur-noch-10-vaquitas-weltweit>

Salzburger Nachrichten (Austria)

<https://www.sn.at/panorama/wissen/walfangkommission-warnt-erstmal-vor-dem-aussterben-einer-art-143240878>

t-online (Germany)

https://www.t-online.de/nachrichten/panorama/tiere/id_100220260/bedrohte-wal-art-forscher-schlagen-alarm-nur-noch-zehn-vaquitas-.html

Blick (Switzerland)

<https://www.blick.ch/life/natur/nur-noch-10-exemplare-internationale-walfangkommission-warnt-vor-aussterben-der-vaquitas-id18815887.html>

Der Standard (Austria)

<https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000181979/kalifornische-schweinswale-akut-vom-aussterben-bedroht?ref=rss>

Öko News (Austria)

https://www.oekonews.at/?mdoc_id=1183291

Watson (Switzerland)

<https://www.watson.ch/wissen/tier/346983387-vaquita-von-diesem-netten-kerlchen-gibt-es-nur-noch-10-exemplare>

20 min (Switzerland)

<https://www.20min.ch/story/kalifornischer-schweinswal-vaquita-vom-aussterben-bedroht-413871949712>

Latina Press

<https://latina-press.com/news/315072-organisierte-umweltkriminalitaet-aussterbewarnung-fuer-den-vaquita/>

TGR Tagesschau (Rai News) (Italy – South Tyrol)

<https://www.rainews.it/tgr/tagesschau/articoli/2023/08/kleinste-walart-der-welt-droht-auszusterben-43292632-b159-417f-b3d2-357bc6dc5970.html>

Schaumburger Zeitung (Germany)

https://www.szlz.de/news/thema-des-tages_artikel,-walfangkommission-warnt-vor-aussterben-der-vaquitas- arid,2817328.html

Belgisches Rundfunk- und Fernsehzentrum der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft (BRF) (Belgium)

<https://brf.be/international/1745460/>

Stader Tageblatt

https://www.tageblatt.de/welt/brennpunkte_artikel,-walfangkommission-warnt-vor-aussterben-der-vaquitas- arid,2925446.html

Also reported:

Austrian national radio news: 7 August – no link available

Known Third Party Social Media

Linked In

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/marine-acoustics-inc_first-extinction-alert-issued-in-70-years-activity-7117279330375712769-FCnD?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop

Facebook

https://www.facebook.com/groups/568141499972733/search/?q=vaquita&locale=en_GB