

MEXICO

Voluntary National Cetacean Conservation Report, 2012-2014

While recognizing the existence of differing views regarding the IWC Conservation Mexico considers that with the submission of national information on a voluntary basis is a way to address cetacean conservation matters, in a spirit of cooperation, and a via to learn from experiences in other Countries.

National Governmental Authority Submitting the Report:

Secretaría del Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales, SEMARNAT (Ministry of The Environment and Natural Resources)

1. LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS (laws, regulations and other regulatory measures related to cetaceans)

– **NOM-002-PESC (Mexican Standard 002-PESC)**

In June 6, 2013 the Mexican government approved this Mexican Official Standard 002-PESC that requires fishermen to switch from shrimp gillnets to alternative fishing gear over a three-year period: 30, 30 and 40% annual reduction 2013-2016 to protect the vaquita. So far 96 fishermen have requested support to transfer to the new alternative fishing gear (see below Vaquita recovery actions).

– **Protocolo para la atención de varamientos de mamíferos marinos (Protocol for marine mammal strandings)**

In June 17 2014, The National Register published the AGREEMENT whereby the attention Protocol for marine mammal strandings was issued.

2. CURRENT GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS RELATED TO CETACEAN CONSERVATION

– **National Network to Attend Entangled Whales (RABEN)**

To address the problem of whale entanglements in fishing gear RABEN (The National Network to Attend Entangled Whales) was created. This is a interagency team, working together with NGOs, whalewatching tour operators and uinversities to carry out rescues of whales from fishing gear. RABEN started in Banderas Bay, in the Pacific Coast of Mexico, in 2004. By 2012, with the support from the National Commission of Natural Protected Areas (CONANP), it became a National Network and 12 teams have been trained and equiped with the support of both, CONANP and IWC.

This year three more teams will join RABEN. The protocol we use to free whale has been tested successfully and approved by the IWC. It ensures personnel safety and a minimal impact to whales. From its beginning to date RABEN has released 33 whales in a coordinated and secure manner.

– **Joint IWC-SPAW Training Workshop to Address Lethal Human Impacts on Marine Mammals of the (Spanish-speaking) Wider Caribbean. La Paz, BCS, Mexico.**

In November 27-29, 2012 the training for entanglement response teams took place on two days, out of the three-day training workshop, and followed the overall strategy and curriculum developed by the IWC expert advisory panel for this topic (Annex E and F of IWC/64/WKM&AWIRep1).

For the training, given the number of participants, two trainers from the IWC's expert panel were used (David Mattila and Ed Lyman). Additionally, an extra day was added to the La Paz workshop, in order to conduct training on the forensic determination of human impacts, for leaders of stranding response teams from the region. This training was conducted by two

international recognized experts on this topic (Dr. Michael Moore and Dr. Frances Gulland). The number of participants was 55 from Costa Rica, República Dominicana, Panama and Mexico

- **Large whales disentanglement workshop of the Mexican Pacific, Bahía de Banderas, Jal-Nay., Mexico.**

In November 12-14, 2012 training of entanglement response teams by David Mattila and Ed Lyman, was sponsored by CONANP and Ecología y Conservación de ballenas A.C. (ECOBANS). We had 50 participants from different regions of the Mexican Pacific.

- **AGREEMENT that it discloses the Management Program of the Biosphere Reserve Bahía de los Ángeles y Canal Sal si Puedes.**

This agreement was published on November 5, 2103 in the Federal Register. This Reserve, in the Gulf of California, is an important marine mammal protected area, where 16 species of whales and dolphins have been reported, belonging to families Balaenopteridae, Eschrichtiidae, Physteridae, Kogiidae, Ziphiidae and Delphinidae.

Vaquita recovery actions

- **The Advisory Commission to the Presidency of Mexico for the Recovery of Vaquita (CAP)**

The New Mexican Government, that took office in December 2012, established CAP in order to propose strategies, environmental, economic and social actions to prevent the extinction of vaquita and foster its recovery. The Commission is constituted by five high level government officers from the Ministries of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT) and of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food (SAGARPA). It also includes two members of Congress, four NGO representatives, four scientific advisors, four artisanal fisheries representatives, and one from the Navy (SEMAR). The Commission has met five times since April 2013. A major achievement of CAP has been the negotiations to publish in the Federal Register Mexican Standard 002 (NOM-002-PESC) that requires fishermen to switch from shrimp gillnets to alternative fishing (see item 1 above).

Derived from agreements of CAP, another important development was the signing of a Framework Cooperation Agreement between the SEMAR, SEMARNAT and the Federal Office for Environmental Protection (PROFEPA) to implement joint actions on enforcement and inspection. Through this agreement, SEMARNAT channeled to SEMAR \$80 million pesos (~6,121,191.95 USD) for the acquisition of eight patrol boats that will support enforcement by PROFEPA and SEMAR in areas requiring special attention, particularly the Upper Gulf of California.

This year, 11 integral enforcement and surveillance operations conducted in the Upper Gulf of California to protect the vaquita and the illegal traffic totoaba, have secured 4.5 tons of fish products, 27 totoaba swim bladders and 24 poaching boats, among others.

Recently, August 28th, the CAP held an extraordinary meeting to follow-up CIRVA's recommendations and progress in fisheries management and enforcement in the Upper Gulf of California. Currently the federal government is preparing a comprehensive proposal (collecting recommendations by CIRVA-5, see below) to avoid vaquita mortality in fishing nets and a complete mechanism for compensation to fishermen.

- **Fifth Meeting of the International Committee for the Recover of Vaquita (CIRVA).**

The fifth meeting of CIRVA was held at the Hotel Coral y Marina in Ensenada, BC from July 8 - 10, 2014. Despite all efforts made to date, the most recent acoustic data show the vaquita population to be declining at 18.5% per year. This dramatic decline is a consequence of the illegal fishery of totoaba (scyanid fish also endangered) to satisfy black market demand for the swim bladder medicinal soup in mainland China and Hong Kong.

The best estimate of current abundance is 97 vaquitas of which fewer than 25 are likely to be reproductively mature females. The vaquita will be extinct, possibly by 2018, if fishery by-catch is not eliminated immediately. Therefore, 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.

Shipstrikes

- **Deploying small satellite transmitter tags on gray whales in Laguna San Ignacio, Mexico, to assess space use and risk during migration.**

In 2012 we reported the planned research between Mexico's National Institute of Ecology (currently Institute of Ecology and Climate Change [INECC]) and the US National Marine Fisheries Service, Southwest Fisheries Science Centre (SWFSC), to study the fine scale space use of gray whale's migration routes, using satellite telemetry, and to be able to assess spatial risk to design shipping lanes. Tagging took place from March 5th - March 7th 2012 in Laguna San Ignacio, Baja California Sur, Mexico. A field team of scientists from SWFSC worked collaboratively with researchers from INECC and the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur (UABCS). We deployed a total of 14 LIMPET and 4 FLAT IMPLANT successfully. We hope further funds will be available to continue this joint research.