

MEXICO

Voluntary National Cetacean Conservation Report, 2016-2018  
Submitted to the Conservation Committee  
International Whaling Commission  
67th Meeting of the International Whaling Commission  
Brazil, September 2018

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.

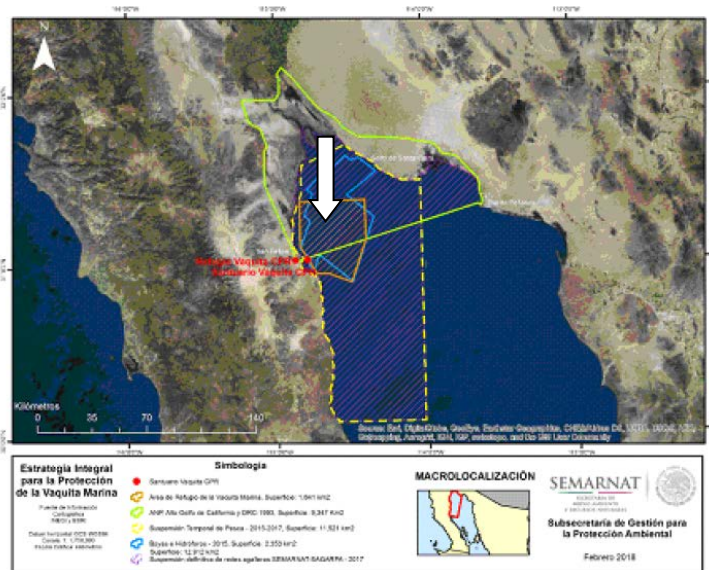
**National Governmental Authority Submitting the Report:**

Comisión de Áreas Naturales Protegidas (CONANP)/Secretaría del Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (SEMARNAT)

**1. Legal Developments (laws, regulations and other regulatory measures related to cetaceans)**

To Protect Vaquita And Its Habitat:

- Federal Register (DOF) June 30, 2017: AGREEMENT By Which It Is Prohibited, Artifacts, Systems, Methods, Techniques And Schedules For The Performance Of Fishing Activities With Small Boats In Marine Waters Of Federal Jurisdiction Of The United Mexican States In The North Of The Gulf Of California, And Landing Sites Are Established, As Well As The Use Of Monitoring Systems For Such Boats
- DOF April 20, 2018: AGREEMENT That Modifies Diverse Provisions By Which The Refuge Area Is Established For The Protection Of The Vaquita (Phocoena Sinus).



In this new area, as recommended by Comité Internacional para la Recuperación de la Vaquita (CIRVA) 10th meeting, navigation, any fishing activities, nautical tourism, as well as any other

activity that could be developed in the polygon are restricted. The new polygon increased from 1,200 Km<sup>2</sup> to 1,841 Km<sup>2</sup>.

In order to preserve the habitat of cetaceans and other marine species in general, during these past years, six protected natural areas were decreed, of which, the Revillagigedo National Park and the reserves of the Deep Mexican Pacific Biosphere Reserve (43,614,688.24 ha), the Mexican Caribbean, and the Pacific islands of the Baja California Peninsula, host a high diversity of marine flora and fauna, much of it endemic and in some category of risk.

The 9th of August of this year the DOF published the Agreement by which the Marine Ecological Management Programme Region of the North Pacific, which states that one of the mechanism models well defined for the region was whale warching.

## **2. Current Government Programs Related to Cetacean Conservation**

### **A. Vaquita Conservation, Protection and Recovery (VCPR)**

During its 8th meeting, the Comite Internacional para la Recuperacion de la Vaquita (CIRVA) approved an emergency conservation action plan to bring some vaquitas into a temporary sanctuary and recommended immediate implementation to save the vaquita from extinction. In response to this recommendation, the Government of Mexico approved the plan and the Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (SEMARNAT) took the lead to orchestrate a multi-institutional collaboration and plan. VCPR Consortium set out on a courageous path to buy the vanishing vaquita porpoise more time on the planet. Vaquitas have been disappearing at an alarming rate due to drowning in illegal fishing nets in the Gulf of California. With a team of 90 experts from 9 countries, it was attempted to rescue the remaining vaquitas from extinction and bring them into a temporary sanctuary. Sadly the rescue plans were suspended because vaquitas reacted poorly to being in a new environment and tragically an adult female died. With fewer than 30 vaquitas remaining, the risk was too high to continue rescue operations, but the risk of extinction is also too high to give up.

#### **From VCPR Consortium: Rescue Efforts**

*VaquitaCPR's goal was to bring vaquitas into temporary human care until all gillnets for shrimp and finfish were banned and removed from their habitat. Particularly harmful are the illegal nets to catch a large fish, the totoaba, which is butchered for its swim bladder, smuggled to China and Hong Kong, and sold for thousands of dollars. Along with the totoaba and masses of other marine life, vaquitas get entangled in these nets and drown.*

*As we prepared for this bold conservation endeavor, the world's best biologists and veterinarians joined our efforts. We worked tirelessly to be ready for October field operations, assembling international teams with expertise on all aspects of the proposed work and an expert advisory group to provide guidance at critical stages throughout the implementation of the plan. A state-of-the-art floating sea enclosure called 'El Nido' – The Nest – was constructed and anchored just off the coast of San Felipe, Mexico in close proximity to the vaquitas' native waters. Additionally, a land-based care center was built at the foot of Machorro Mountain, ready to protect and care for vaquitas if needed.*

*As the winds settled down in early October and our team set out on the water, we were thrilled to spot several animals and begin our rescue mission. Our first encounter was with a 6-month-old female, the age of weaning for vaquitas. Unfortunately, this animal was not adapting well to being in our care. Within just a few hours, we put her back in the Gulf close to where she was found. This was a major setback, as we were unsure if her inability to adapt was due to her age, or simply to her species. We modified our facilities, enhanced our plans, and tried again.*

*We experienced several days of high winds before our team could get back on the water. When the weather took a positive turn, we restarted our search effort and encountered a mature female vaquita with no evidence of pregnancy or lactation. She was calm and quiet and showed some positive signs of acclimating to her new environment. But then her condition abruptly changed. She was urgently released, but then circled right back to our team in need of emergency care. She died in the arms of a team that had*

*courageously gathered to give vaquitas a chance at survival. Heartbroken and devastated, the team halted capture operations.*

#### B. Vaquita Acoustic Monitoring Programme.

The Government of Mexico, through the SEMARNAT, has continued to support the acoustic monitoring program. The results of the program, has been conducted annually since 2011. The 2011-2017 data series gathered from the regular 46 C-pod sampling grid, shows a continued decline in vaquita detections with no change in the trend since the last report in 2016.

An important development took place in 2017: a near-real-time sampling scheme was developed to provide data on vaquita distribution over short timeframes to support the Vaquita Conservation, Protection and Recovery project (VaquitaCPR). This consisted of an enhanced sampling grid of 87 sites, covering the entire Vaquita Refuge and areas around the margins.

The sampling plan for 2018 will include again the sampling grid of 87 sites. A new abundance estimate is expected to be ready by December this year.

#### C. Multi-Institutional Program to Remove Fishing Gear from the Sea

Following CIRVA 7 recommendation, another of the conservation efforts to prevent vaquita extinction started in early October of 2016. This is a multi-institutional program composed of government agencies (led by SEMARNAT), local fishermen of San Felipe (Coperativa Islas del Golfo y PESC ABC) and civil society organizations: Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, Museo de la Ballenas, WWF-Mexico, PRONATURA, Parley for the Oceans and World Animal Protection. Results from the multi-institutional program to remove fishing gear from the sea, showed that since the start of the program in October 2016, and until June 2018, a total of 1, 100 nets were extracted in 265 effective days at sea. From January to June 2018 557 nets were removed from the sea. About 80% were active nets and about 90% were fishing gear to catch totoaba. The removed nets are recycled by Parley for the Oceans.

#### Other Actions

2016. As part of the Programa de Atención a Especies Prioritarias – PACE (Program of Attention to Priority Species) the project for the Evaluation of the abundance, population trend and spatial distribution of fin whales in the Gulf of California, started with the collaboration of six research institutions of the Baja California peninsula. Also includes the 2016 Integration of the unique catalogue of the fin whales in the Gulf of California:

(<http://www.conanp.gob.mx/contenido/pdf/CATALOGOPHYSALUS-PROCER2016-FINAL.pdf>)