

## Resolution 2007-5

### RESOLUTION: THE VAQUITA, FROM CRITICALLY ENDANGERED TO FACING EXTINCTION

**CONCERNED** with the finding of the Scientific Committee concurring with the recent results of the baiji survey in the Yangtze River that has led the scientific community to conclude that the baiji is functionally extinct. It is the first cetacean species to disappear in modern times. The main factors that drove the baiji (*Lipotes vexillifer*) to extinction were habitat degradation and incidental catch.

**RECALLING** that since 1991 the IWC SC has recommended that conservation actions must be taken immediately to eliminate bycatch of the vaquita (*Phocoena sinus*) in the northernmost Gulf of California, Mexico, to prevent its extinction. Moreover, since 1997 the International Committee for the Recovery of Vaquita (CIRVA) has recommended that bycatch be reduced to zero by banning entangling nets throughout the vaquita's range whilst noting the difficulties involved in trying to reconcile the vaquita's need for immediate protection with the needs of the affected people.

**FURTHER RECALLING** that IUCN has listed the vaquita as Vulnerable in 1978, Endangered in 1990 and Critically Endangered since 1996.

**NOTING** that CIRVA recommended a staged reduction in fishing effort starting in January 2000, with the expectation that gillnetting would be completely eliminated by January 2002.

**FURTHER NOTING** that in March 2007 the IUCN Director-General expressed, through a letter to the President of Mexico, that organization's grave concern about the future of the vaquita. IUCN also acknowledged the serious social and economic implications of banning the use of entangling nets in the Northern Gulf and indicated that conservation efforts must include programs that will help meet the needs of people in the region.

**FURTHER NOTING** that Mexico has followed many of the recommendations to protect and monitor the vaquita, e.g. by closing the totoaba fishery, protecting the vaquita's habitat through Marine Protected Areas (Biosphere Reserve of the Upper Gulf of California and Delta of the Colorado River and the recently declared Vaquita Refuge), and implementing an acoustic monitoring program.

**FURTHER RECALLING** that the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources and the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries have been working cooperatively with several non-governmental organizations to implement a comprehensive recovery plan with a strong socio-economic component as recommended by CIRVA.

**FURTHER CONCERNED** that progress towards reducing/eliminating entanglement has been very slow despite efforts to ban gillnets from the vaquita's core area of occurrence and elsewhere in the Northern Gulf. The baiji experience shows that extinction can happen rapidly and without evidence of a steady or prolonged decline, if appropriate conservation actions are not taken promptly.

**FURTHER NOTING** that the vaquita's survival is at a critical juncture. The best hope for the species is that the international community and non-governmental organizations will support the Government of Mexico by providing technical and financial assistance in the implementation of CIRVA's Recovery Plan and the Biosphere Reserve.

#### **NOW THEREFORE THE COMMISSION:**

**COMMENDS** Mexico's intense recent efforts to prevent the extinction of the vaquita despite the difficulties involved in reducing bycatch to zero, and especially given the difficulties of providing alternative livelihoods to isolated fishing communities in the Northern Gulf.

**FURTHER COMMENDS** the President of Mexico for the recent announcement on the Conservation Program for Endangered Species (PROCER), which calls for the implementation of specific Species Conservation Action Programs (PACE) for a list of selected species. The vaquita is among the top five species on this list.

**URGES** the Members of IWC and the world community to support Mexico's efforts to prevent the extinction of the vaquita by reducing bycatch to zero in the immediate future and assisting in providing financial resources and technical as well as socio-economic expertise.