

Media release

For immediate release

Mexican Government and WWF establish international expert committee to boost vaquita-safe fishing

- A Protocol and guidelines to catch shrimp with vaquita-safe technology to be ready in two weeks

Mexico City (28 July 2016).- As part of the bilateral collaboration measures announced last week at the White House by Presidents Barack Obama and Enrique Peña Nieto to protect the endangered vaquita porpoise, of which fewer than 60 remain on the planet, Mexico's National Institute of Fisheries (INAPESCA) and WWF Mexico established an international committee of experts to further develop and urgently implement vaquita-safe fishing technologies.

"This experts committee will advise the Mexican government on improving fishing techniques not harmful to vaquita, including those that INAPESCA and WWF Mexico have together developed over the last years," said Pablo Arenas, head of INAPESCA. "As President Peña Nieto underlined last week, saving the world's smallest and most endangered porpoise is a high priority for the Mexican government."

This independent committee has been charged with improving existing vaquita-safe fishing technologies (such as the small trawl to catch shrimp and traps and other gear for fish) to substitute gillnets which will be permanently prohibited starting September in the Upper Gulf of California, the only place on Earth where the vaquita exists.

"I am honored to have been invited to chair this committee, which includes some of the world's foremost experts in new fishing technologies, and I look forward to working with the Mexican government to develop fishing gear that does not interact with vaquitas," said Christopher Glass of the University of New Hampshire. "Giving the urgency of our task, we have agreed on an aggressive work plan to improve and develop gear that demonstrate that fishing can continue with no impact on vaquita."

The committee is comprised of experts from Texas A&M University, NOAA South East Fisheries Center, Swedish University of Agriculture Science, Technological University of Denmark, Canada's Fisheries and Marine Institute, New England Aquarium, FAO, INAPESCA and WWF.

"Scaling up the commercial use of fishing technologies that does not kill vaquitas is a high priority because this will allow fishermen and their families to make a sustainable way of living. We will be working with buyers in California and other parts of the U.S. to promote preferential markets for vaquita-safe seafood so that fishermen are rewarded for their

efforts to protect this porpoise," said Omar Vidal, CEO of WWF Mexico, an organization serving as technical secretariat for the experts committee. "A future in which both vaquitas and sustainable local fishing communities thrive is within our hand's reach. If we together can make this happen, Mexico will send a wave of hope to other countries in which several species and populations of small cetaceans are being driven to extinction by accidental entanglement in gillnets."

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Note to Editors:

- The expert committee on fishing technologies for the Upper Gulf of California met last Friday in Mexico City as a follow up to the Workshop on Fishing Technologies, part of the Symposium on Technology Development and Sustainable Fisheries co-organized by the International Council for the Exploration of Seas (ICES) and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

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