

Marine Mammal Commission
4340 East-West Highway, Room 700
Bethesda, MD 20814-4447

25 March 2008

Vice Admiral Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Jr., Ph.D.
Undersecretary for Oceans and Atmosphere
Department of Commerce
14th and Constitution Avenue, NW, Room 5128
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Admiral Lautenbacher:

On 7 March 2008 Mexico's Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources and the Ministry of Fisheries jointly announced that they would be working together to conserve the vaquita. Their announcement sends an important and welcome signal that, it is hoped, will bring additional resources, creativity, and solutions to this conservation challenge. Nonetheless, as we discussed on 18 December 2007, much remains to be done to recover the vaquita. Progress to date has been painstaking, and further progress will require great commitment and persistence. Collective efforts toward recovery have been building for some years, but they remain tentative and in need of constant bolstering.

The Marine Mammal Commission recognizes that this is a difficult fiscal climate for all agencies. We are particularly aware of the fiscal constraints on NOAA, which assumes so many vital responsibilities in the management and stewardship of our oceans. In addition, we are generally reluctant to recommend funding for specific projects outside the context of other demands. In this case, however, our reservations are outweighed by the urgency of the vaquita situation.

We are writing now to urge you to support the Southwest Fisheries Science Center's upcoming cruise in the Gulf of California. NOAA scientists from this center are international leaders in their fields, and their determined work has been central to U.S. efforts to facilitate vaquita recovery. They have studied vaquita abundance and distribution, participated on the international recovery team, and provided numerous reports to inform the decision-makers who are responsible for vaquita recovery.

The recovery of the vaquita depends on the will of Mexican officials. The scientific information from this cruise will inform those officials, strengthen the basis for their decisions, and provide valuable insights into thoughtful and creative recovery measures.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. Please contact me if we can provide additional information regarding the cruise specifically or recovery efforts for the vaquita generally.

Sincerely,



Timothy J. Ragen, Ph.D.
Executive Director