

MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION
4340 East-West Highway, Room 700
Bethesda, MD 20814-4447

10 April 2009

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

The Marine Mammal Commission urges you to direct \$30 million from the Department of State's budget for energy and the environment to recover the vaquita, a small porpoise found only in the northern Gulf of California. The species numbers about 150 individuals and is teetering at the very brink of extinction. The major threat is a Mexican gillnet fishery for shrimp. The United States is the primary beneficiary of the fishery, as the vast majority of the catch is sold in U.S. markets. A contribution from the Department of State would be an act of responsible, meaningful partnership with Mexico as it attempts to address this conservation crisis.

The Mexican government has developed a plan for saving this species and is taking vital steps to implement it. Mexican authorities are buying and destroying some of the entangling fishing gear, renting other gear to remove it from the water while they develop safe alternatives, and seeking to provide alternative livelihoods for the affected fishermen.

Sections 101 and 108 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (16 U.S.C. §§ 1371, 1378) provide the authority and set the standards for responsible action by the United States, but for the vaquita we have yet to adhere to these provisions in a way that achieves the Act's goals. Section 202 of the Act directs the Marine Mammal Commission to recommend to you appropriate international arrangements for the protection and conservation of marine mammals—the purpose of this letter. The United States has a history of contributing to vaquita recovery, largely in the form of scientific and socioeconomic expertise. However, the Commission believes that these contributions have not been commensurate with our moral and legal responsibilities for conserving the vaquita, nor have they been sufficient to achieve the goals of the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

To save the vaquita, Mexico needs—

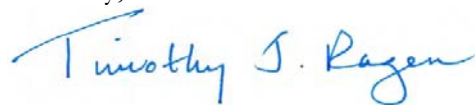
- **A clear expression of support from the United States**
Mexican authorities are striving to balance social and economic concerns and warrant our support.
- **Resources to sustain recovery efforts**
By the end of 2009 the Mexican government plans to have directed a total of about \$36 million (U.S.) to vaquita recovery efforts. It needs additional resources to remove the entangling gear, develop safe gear, implement and enforce conservation measures, and maintain socioeconomic stability in the northern Gulf of California.

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
10 April 2009
Page 2

The Commission urges you to lead a meaningful response to this crisis. The United States needs to act decisively to help Mexico secure the survival of the vaquita. Only by doing so can we avoid the mistakes that allowed the Yangtze River dolphin to go extinct in the past few years. The funds that we hope you will contribute to vaquita conservation would be directed toward well-considered recovery measures that are recognized as essential by the involved parties in both Mexico and the United States and that have already achieved a degree of success. An investment by the Department of State would go a long way toward ensuring recovery of the vaquita, protecting the region's biodiversity, and sustaining the northern Gulf of California ecosystem and the local communities that depend on it.

I have enclosed a briefing paper with more detailed information and would be pleased to meet with you or your staff to discuss this matter further if that would be helpful.

Sincerely,



Timothy J. Ragen, Ph.D.
Executive Director

Enclosure

Copy with enclosure:

The Honorable Thad Cochran
The Honorable Doc Hastings
The Honorable Kay Bailey Hutchinson
The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye
The Honorable Jerry Lewis
The Honorable Gary Locke
The Honorable Jane Lubchenco
The Honorable Dave Obey
The Honorable Nick J. Rahall
The Honorable John D. Rockefeller, IV
The Honorable Nancy Sutley