

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Dave Bader

dbader@lbaop.org

MEDIA ADVISORY

SAN FELIPE, BAJA, MEXICO -- The entire VaquitaCPR team is deeply saddened to report that during field operations to rescue the world's most critically endangered marine mammal, a vaquita porpoise has died. With less than 30 vaquitas left on Earth, the entire rescue team is heartbroken by this devastating loss.

Extreme precautions and significant planning have gone into every aspect of the VaquitaCPR rescue plan. VaquitaCPR assembled many of the most experienced marine mammal experts in the world to determine if human care could rescue them from extinction. No conservation project like this has ever been done before, and the operation comes with significant risk. However, scientists agreed that the risk of extinction in the wild was still far greater than the risk of rescue efforts.

A mature female vaquita, not pregnant or lactating, had been caught and transported successfully late in the afternoon on Saturday in the Northern Gulf of California and was taken to a specially-modified floating sea pen known as *ElNido*, or The Nest. From the moment of capture, the vaquita was under constant care and observation for its health and safety. Marine mammal veterinarians monitoring the vaquita's health noticed the animal's condition began to deteriorate and made the determination to release. The release attempt was unsuccessful and life saving measures were administered. Despite the heroic efforts of the veterinary team, the vaquita did not survive.

Every member of the international rescue team is a leading expert in their field and deeply committed to saving the vaquita from imminent extinction. The rescue operation was considered a great hope for the continued existence of this rare and elusive porpoise which is at severe risk of extinction due to entanglement and drowning in gillnets in Mexico's Gulf of California. Hundreds of vaquitas have been lost since 1997 despite significant efforts by the Mexican government to ban gillnet fishing throughout the vaquitas' range and establish strong enforcement of conservation measures. Illegal gillnet fishing continues.

With so few vaquitas left, this consortium of international conservation and animal care experts was assembled at the request of the Mexican government and scientific community to develop an unprecedented rescue and relocation operation that is

widely recognized as the best hope for vaquitas' existence. The risk of losing a vaquita during field operations was always acknowledged as a possibility, but it was determined that it was unacceptable to stand by and watch the vaquita porpoise disappear without a heroic attempt at rescue.

Vaquita Conservation, Rescue, and Recovery (VaquitaCPR) scientists in collaboration with an independent review panel established for this purpose and the Mexican government, will carefully review the events of the past 24 hours and determine how best to proceed. A necropsy has been performed and tissue samples have been collected to inform in this review.

Update information will be provided as it becomes available.

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VaquitaCPR is an international conservation program led by SEMARNAT in coordination with the National Marine Mammal Foundation, The Marine Mammal Center, and the Chicago Zoological Society. Key collaborators in Mexico include Instituto Nacional de Ecología and Climate Change (INECC), Asociación Mexicana de Hábitats para la Interacción y Protección de Mamíferos Marinos (AMHMAR), Museo de la Ballena, and Baja Aqua Farms. United States collaborators include Duke University and the U.S. Marine Mammal Commission, with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration contributing technical support. World Wildlife Fund is contributing with acoustic monitoring and the retrieval of lost or abandoned “ghost” nets from vaquita habitat. European collaborators include Dolfinarium Harderwijk, Aarhus University, and Fjord&Baelt. Additional support and expertise has been offered from Dolphin Quest, SeaWorld, and the Vancouver Aquarium. VaquitaCPR operates as a private and public partnership, relying on both individual donors and government grants. VaquitaCPR has received generous financial support from the Mexican government, Association of Zoos and Aquariums, Global Wildlife Conservation, Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks & Aquariums, Africam, International Marine Animal Trainer’s Association, Waitt Foundation, Disney Conservation Fund, YAQU PACHA, and the Firedoll Foundation. For information about the plan, visit <http://www.nmmf.org/vaquitacpr-espanol.html>

To support the rescue effort, learn more about the vaquita and for information about VaquitaCPR, visit VaquitaCPR.org

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