

Critically endangered porpoise is focus of new research report

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An international research team, including biologists from NOAA's Fisheries Service, reported in the scientific journal *Conservation Biology*, that the estimated population of vaquita, a porpoise found in the Gulf of California, is likely two years away from reaching such low levels that their rate to extinction will increase and possibly be irreversible. Scientists believe only about 150 vaquita remain.

The research team, led by Armando Jaramillo, Instituto Nacional de Ecología, Mexico, included researchers Barbara Taylor, NOAA's Fisheries Service, and Randy Reeves Reeves, Chair of the Cestacean Specialist Group, IUCN – the World Conservation Union.

The group assessed the number of vaquita based on past estimates of abundance and deaths in fishing nets together with current fishing effort. Approximately 30 vaquita drown each year in the Gulf of California when they become entangled in nets set for fish and shrimp.

Vaquita are found only in a small area of productive, shallow water in the northernmost Gulf of California. They are listed as endangered species by the United States and Mexico and critically endangered by the World Conservation Union.

Researchers cite worrisome parallels between vaquita and the baiji, a freshwater dolphin in the Yangtze River, which was recently declared likely to be extinct; primarily from entanglement in fishing gear.

Source: National Marine Fisheries Service

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