



INTERVENTION – Sea Shepherd Legal – CITES CoP 18 Document 89 - *Totoaba MacDonaldi*

Thank you, Mr. Chair, we appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this very important discussion. As this is the first time that Sea Shepherd Legal takes the floor, we also take this opportunity to express our deepest condolences to the people of Sri Lanka for the senseless tragedy that unfolded in April. And we thank Switzerland for providing this alternate venue.

Our intervention is based on firsthand experience in the heart of the totoaba poaching conflict – a conflict that is fueled by organized crime.

Over the past five years, under agreement with the government of Mexico, Sea Shepherd has deployed multiple vessels from its patrol fleet, monitoring poaching and retrieving 990 pieces of illegal fishing gear, including approximately 141 kilometers of gillnet – all from vaquita habitat. We have vessels there now.

Just as Mexico's own Navy has come under attack during such patrols, so has Sea Shepherd – its vessels have been boarded by poachers, its drones have been shot down, and its storage of retrieved nets has been ransacked.

Regardless of these setbacks and the lawlessness in the region, Sea Shepherd remains committed because

- despite the fact that there are legal prohibitions against the use of gillnets in vaquita habitat,
- despite the fact that there are established protected zones for vaquita, and
- despite the fact that there is an international trade ban against seafood products from Mexico,

- poachers **operate with impunity,**
- fishing in vaquita habitat has **increased,**
- the use of gillnets remains **rampant,**
- the **vaquita population has not stabilized,**
- yet, **we are not aware of any prosecutions of the poachers operating in the area.**

It is abundantly clear that MORE MUST BE DONE IMMEDIATELY –

Sea Shepherd recommends that Mexico, with strong support from the international community:

1. Undertake the necessary measures to ensure that **no nets enter the waters of the vaquita refuge.** This includes strict fisheries regulations and absolute control of launching areas for fishing boats, currently unmonitored.

2. Provide enforcement officials, with authority to arrest poachers, on board Sea Shepherd vessels and in the vaquita refuge to guarantee 24/7 monitoring.
3. Continue to support Sea Shepherd's efforts to ensure that the vaquita refuge is free of gillnets and work with our legal team to ensure prosecution of violators.
4. Establish checkpoints to monitor gear type on outgoing vessels and catch on incoming vessels. Only allow launching of fishing vessels in few authorized and controlled ramps.
5. Completely and permanently prohibit and enforce against the use of all gillnets in the vaquita refuge. There is not any circumstance that justifies the use of gillnets in vaquita habitat.

The vaquita do not have time for long negotiations about what to do next.

We know what needs to be done.

Let's just do it.

Thank you again, Mr. Chair.