

## Vaquita Marina Lost at the Sea of Cortez, Mexico

**Aguilar-Estrada DE<sup>1</sup> and Santos L<sup>2\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Facultad de Ciencias Químicas, Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí (UASLP), San Luis Potosí, Mexico

<sup>2</sup>División de Biología Molecular, Instituto Potosino de Investigación Científica y Tecnológica, A.C. (IPICYT), San Luis Potosí, Mexico

**\*Corresponding author:** Leticia Santos, Ph.D, División de Biología Molecular, Instituto Potosino de Investigación Científica y Tecnológica, AC (IPICYT), Camino a la Presa San José 2055, Col. Lomas 4a. Sección, CP 78216, San Luis Potosí, Mexico, Tel: +524448342057; Email: lsantos@ipicyt.edu.mx

### Opinion Article

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### Opinion

The Sea of Cortez (Gulf of California) and its islands are the most biologically dynamic areas that, remarkably, possess more than 5,000 micro invertebrates, 695 plant and 891 fish species (UNESCO, World heritage site)[1]. It is located at the northeastern of the Peninsula of Baja California, Mexico and embraces an area of about 160,000 km<sup>2</sup>. It is shelter for about 40 percent of the species of marine mammals that exist in the world, among them the cetaceans, which are born, fed and bred while they visit its rich water.

From the 90 endemic fish species, the vaquita marina (*Phocoena sinus*) a porpoise with an average length of 150cm [2] and a unique genetic background [3,4], is currently the most threatened marine mammal in the world due to anthropogenic influence [5] and chronologically; the catch of totoaba fish, sharks and shrimps [6]. By 2008, the abundance of vaquitas was estimated to be 245 [7]; this count was reduced to 60 in 2016 [8,9].

In October 2017, an international team commanded by Mexico and US governments initiated a strategy to rescue the last 30 vaquitas left with the help of four US navy-trained dolphins (Andrea, Fathom, Katrina and Splash). The intention of this plan was to increase the number of vaquitas in captivity. Despite the efforts, the mission was desolately aborted in November after a breeding-age female was captured and died just few hours after being placed in a protective fish tank. The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), Animal Welfare Institute (AWI)

and Center for Biological Diversity reported an impossibility to ban seafood imports from vaquitas' habitat by the US National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The notice of legal violation from the abovementioned organizations was sent to US federal government on November 21st; however it is probable that next year, with the fishing season (January-March) this rare mammal will be extinct.

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