



The Society for Marine Mammalogy

<http://www.marinemammalogy.org>

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President

D. Ann Pabst
University of North Carolina Wilmington
Biology and Marine Biology
601 S. College Road
Wilmington, NC 28403 USA
pabsta@uncw.edu

President-Elect

Charles Littnan
636A Halela Street
Honolulu, HI 96374 USA
charles.littnan@gmail.com

Secretary

Tara Cox
Savannah State University
3219 College Street
Savannah, GA 31404 USA
coxt@savannahstate.edu

Treasurer

Katie Moore
International Fund for Animal Welfare
290 Summer Street
Yarmouth Port, MA 02675 USA
kmoore@ifaw.org

Members at Large

Alex Zerbini
Marine Mammal Laboratory
Alaska Fisheries Science Center/NOAA
7600 Sand Point Way, N.E.
Seattle, WA 98115 USA

Cecile Vincent
Centre d'Études Biologiques de Chizé
CNRS/University of La Rochelle
2 rue Olympe de Gouges
17 000 La Rochelle, France
cvincent@univ-lr.fr

Courtney Smith (Student)
University of Southern Mississippi
Psychology Department
118 College Dr. #5025
Hattiesburg, MS 39406 USA
Courtney.e.smith@usm.edu

Raquel Garcia Vernet (Student)
Department of Evolutionary Biology,
Ecology and Environmental Sciences
University of Barcelona
643, Diagonal
08028 Barcelona, Spain
rgarciaver@ub.edu

Minister Changfu HAN
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs
No.11 Nongzhanguan Nanli,
Chaoyang District
Beijing, China 100125

Dear Minister Han,

I am writing to express concern about recent removals of Critically Endangered Yangtze River finless porpoises for public display. China has made an important contribution to conservation by establishing its network of semi-natural reserves for Yangtze porpoises, the world's only freshwater population of a porpoise species. However, the numbers of these porpoises in the main river and the two lakes (Dongting and Poyang) have continued to decline. The populations in the semi-natural reserves provide some insurance for subspecies survival, but equally important, they offer hope for enhancing the wild population. In fact, this was the main reason for establishing the reserves in the first place – to provide porpoises to repopulate the Yangtze and its lakes as conditions in their natural habitat improve. Given this, the rationale behind plans to remove porpoises from the reserves to supply commercial public display facilities, apparently without any evaluation of the conservation implications, is unclear and appears contrary to the strong conservation approach taken by China for this species. We concur with the concerns expressed by the IUCN Cetacean Specialist Group that if these plans go ahead, much of the progress made to date under the Saving Yangtze Finless Porpoise Alliance announced by your ministry could be nullified and reversed.

The Society for Marine Mammalogy is the world's largest professional group dedicated to the study of marine mammals, which includes freshwater dolphins and porpoises. We have a membership of approximately 2,000 scientists from more than 25 countries, including a strong representation from China. Our goal is to facilitate the understanding and conservation of marine mammals and the ecosystems that support them. We strongly urge that you reconsider authorizing the use of animals from the semi-natural reserves to stock public display facilities. Removals of animals from the reserves for such purposes has the effect of depleting the ex situ populations, making additional captures of wild porpoises to restock the reserves



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more likely. As such, this would tend to defeat the primary purpose of the reserves, which is to enhance, rather than increase removals from, the wild population of Yangtze finless porpoises.

Thank you for considering our Society's concerns on this important matter.

Sincerely,

D. Ann Pabst
President