



EUROPEAN CETACEAN SOCIETY



Society for Marine Mammalogy

President Tsai Ing-wen  
Office of the President  
No. 122, Sec. 1, Chongqing S. Rd., Zhongzheng District  
Taipei City 10048, Taiwan (ROC)

29 June 2020

Dear President Tsai:

We are writing to you regarding the plight of the Taiwanese white dolphin (*Sousa chinensis taiwanensis*) and the unique opportunity you have to save this subspecies, which is found only in your waters. The Society for Marine Mammalogy wrote to the Office of the President in 2011, when this population was threatened by a proposed petrochemical plant. This plant was not built, which was an admirable, environmentally sound decision by Taiwan. We note that there is now a proposal to build two Liquefied Natural Gas terminals in white dolphin habitat; we hope that once again your government will decide in favor of the animals and the environment. Clearly, serious threats facing these imperiled dolphins remain unaddressed and as a result the population size has continued to decrease, now reaching perilously low numbers.

Since 2008, the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species has considered this endemic subspecies of Taiwan, which numbers fewer than 75 dolphins, to be *Critically Endangered*. Mortality in fishing nets was identified as the greatest threat to this subspecies in the 2019 Taiwanese White Dolphin Recovery Plan (please see the links to this plan provided below). The Recovery Plan, which was the product of an international workshop of scientists, conservation and fisheries groups, and a representative of the Ocean Conservation Administration, states that a ban on gill and trammel net fishing is “the single most urgent action needed” and if such a ban were effectively enforced, “it would immediately halt the decline in Taiwanese white dolphin population size.”

A third issue of concern is the development of offshore windfarms. While it is commendable that Taiwan is seeking greener energy, we are concerned that the development of offshore windfarms and Liquefied Natural Gas terminals, as currently planned, would reduce the available coastal habitat of Taiwanese white dolphins and, at the same time, displace more fishing effort into the remaining habitat of this critically endangered subspecies. The 2019 Taiwanese White Dolphin Recovery Plan outlines a novel approach to addressing these conflicts. Companies and financiers involved with the developments, while taking suggested actions to decrease their impacts on dolphin habitat, could contribute to government programs to eliminate gill and trammel nets from that habitat by compensating fishers fairly so that they can transition to dolphin-safe fishing methods. Such an innovative solution would be a win for the developers and green energy because they will then be in compliance with the standards of the International Finance Corporation and Equator Principles, a win for fishers, and a win for Taiwanese white dolphins.

We write on behalf of the Society for Marine Mammalogy and the European Cetacean Society, the largest professional associations dedicated to understanding the biology and conservation of marine mammals globally. We agree that the ban on gill and trammel nets is the single most urgent action needed to stop the decline in Taiwanese white dolphins. We are encouraged by the possibility that Taiwan will solicit industry support for programs to reduce the impacts of fisheries on marine mammals. We urge the government of Taiwan to help conserve this dolphin subspecies and maintain globally valued biodiversity for future generations by, in this instance, directing green energy development projects to implement innovative solutions that address the needs of all parties.

Sincerely,



Joan Gonzalvo, Chair  
European Cetacean Society



D. Ann Pabst, President  
Society for Marine Mammalogy

2019 Taiwanese White Dolphin Recovery Plan: <https://reurl.cc/g7j9np> and <https://iucn-csg.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Taiwanese-White-Dolphin-Recovery-Plan-FINAL-14Oct19.pdf>

Cc:

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