



The Society for Marine Mammalogy

<http://www.marinemammalogy.org>

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HONORABLE MARK A. VILLAR

Secretary of the Department of Public Works and Highways
Bonifacio Drive, Port Area
Metro Manila, Philippines

Dear Secretary Villar,

As President of the Society for Marine Mammalogy, I write to express concern about the potential for the proposed Panay-Guimaras-Negros (PGN) Bridges Project to threaten the survival of a Critically Endangered population of Irrawaddy dolphins (*Orcaella brevirostris*) that resides in this region.¹ The Society for Marine Mammalogy is the world's largest professional group dedicated to the study of marine mammals, with a membership of approximately 2,000 scientists from more than 35 countries. Our goal is to facilitate the understanding and conservation of marine mammals and the ecosystems that support them.

The Irrawaddy dolphin population in the Iloilo-Guimaras Straits is extremely small, with roughly 10-30 remaining individuals. The population's core habitat is limited to the Pulupandan-Bago estuary and coastal waters of Buenavista. These dolphins are integral to the lives of fishermen in Iloilo, Guimaras, and Negros, who use the dolphins' occurrence to indicate the locations of concentrations of fish and shrimp. The Iloilo-Guimaras Straits Irrawaddy dolphin population is one of only three known Philippine populations of this globally Endangered species (red-listed by the IUCN), each of them isolated from the others. The other two Philippine populations are in Malampaya Sound, Palawan (also red-listed by IUCN as Critically Endangered) and in coastal waters of Quezon.

Studies led by Philippine scientists indicate that the Pulupandan-Bago (on Negros) and Buenavista (on Guimaras) areas support relatively high densities of dolphins; the animals use these areas for feeding, nursing their young, and resting. I am concerned that the proposed construction at the entrances and exits of these bridges will damage and degrade vital habitat



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of these critically endangered dolphins and therefore I encourage you to construct the bridge outside habitat critical to the dolphins.

Ensuring that Irrawaddy dolphins survive in the Iloilo-Guimaras Straits will not only contribute to the conservation of global biodiversity, but will also help to preserve the natural heritage of the Ilonggo people.

Thank you for your kind attention to this matter. We would be pleased to offer our Society's members' expertise should you need advice on the dolphin's biology that will aide in locating the bridge to preserve dolphin critical habitat.

Sincerely,

Cc:

Karl Kendrick T. Chua, Acting Socio-Economic Secretary, National Economic Development Authority
Roy A. Cimatu, Secretary, Department of Environment and Natural Resources
William Dollente Dar, Ph.D., Secretary of the Department of Agriculture
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