

CETACEAN SPECIALIST GROUP

10 January 2012

Julia Marton-Lefèvre
Director General, IUCN (Julia.Marton-Lefevre@iucn.org)

Tim Badman
Head, IUCN World Heritage Programme (tim.badman@iucn.org)

Dear Julia and Tim:

I have been advised that an international team from IUCN will be inspecting the conservation standards of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and World Heritage Area in early 2012.

In anticipation of this visit, I, on behalf of the SSC Cetacean Specialist Group, would like to draw your attention to the potentially deleterious consequences of the proposed BalACLava Island Coal Export Terminal, Fitzroy River Coal Terminal and expansion of Gladstone Port Corporation at the northern end of Curtis Island, to the local population of Australian snubfin dolphins (*Orcaella heinsohni*). This population is of global significance, as it is the southernmost occurrence of a regionally endemic species. The dolphins in this area are geographically isolated and particularly vulnerable because of their small numbers (probably fewer than about 85 individuals), naturally low recruitment rate, and restricted distribution, which significantly overlaps or coincides with the proposed port development area. The geographical isolation of this population is supported by preliminary results of genetic analyses indicating differentiation between it and other small, isolated populations of snubfin dolphins in Northern Queensland, some of which are also likely to be threatened by port developments in the World Heritage Area.

The CSG is concerned that the proposed development would involve, among other things, major increases in underwater noise, vessel traffic and water pollution, and that this would significantly degrade if not destroy the dolphins' habitat. The cumulative impacts, including reductions in prey populations and even occasional accidental mortality of dolphins as a result of vessel strikes, could compromise the long-term viability of this small population.

We understand that concerns were raised about approval of the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) developments on Curtis Island within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area during the June 2011 meeting of the World Heritage Committee, and that a joint World Heritage Centre and IUCN Monitoring Mission will visit the World Heritage Area at the invitation of the Australian government.

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We hope that the Mission will have the opportunity during its visit to Australia to: (1) investigate first-hand these concerns about the potentially deleterious impacts of the proposed port developments on the snubfin dolphins in the Balaclava Island region, and (2) discuss the situation with local cetacean scientists with whom the Cetacean Specialist Group would be delighted to organise introductions.

Please contact me for further assistance and advice on this matter.

Sincerely



Randall Reeves, Chair
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cc:

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