

Species Profile: Vaquita (*Phocoena sinus*)

Conservation Status (IUCN): Critically Endangered (CR)
(facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild)

The vaquita is the smallest member of the cetacean family (whales, porpoises, dolphins) and the most endangered marine mammal in the world. First assessed as critically endangered in a 1996 IUCN report, the vaquita has become a symbol for environmental sustainability.

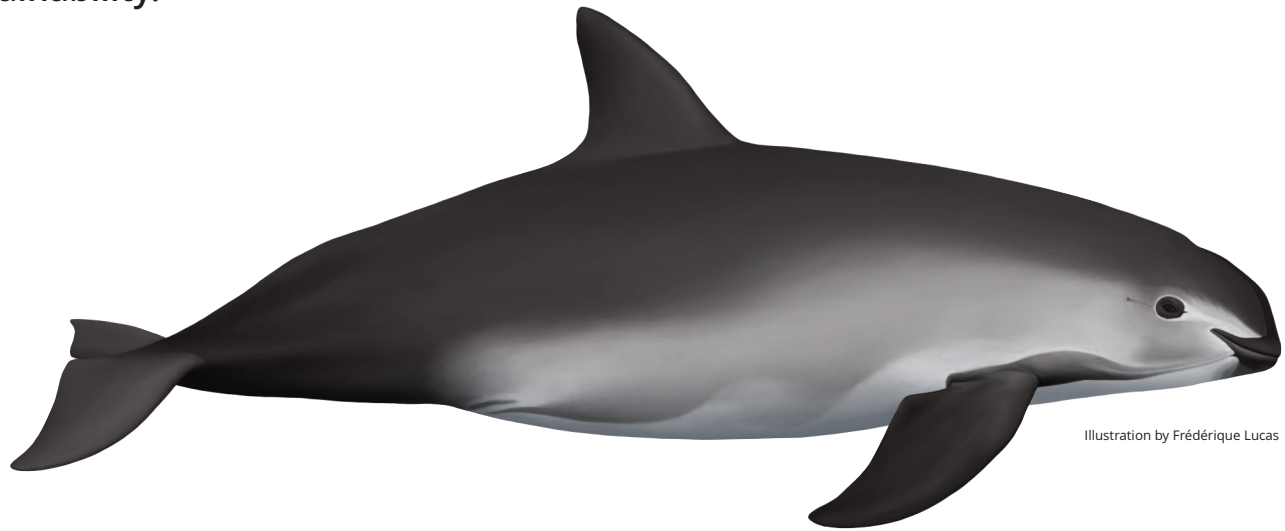


Illustration by Frédérique Lucas

Range:

Found only in the northern Gulf of California (Sea of Cortez), Mexico.

Physical Description and Identifying Features:

Vaquita are identified by their tall, triangular dorsal fin, dark eye and beak tip, and dark grey/brown colour.

Behaviour and Ecology:

Usually found singly or in pairs, with occasional sightings of groups up to 10 animals. Like other porpoises, inconspicuous and slow surfacing.

Conservation Concerns:

With an estimated population of less than 30 individuals and ongoing decline due to entanglement in gillnets, vaquita are the most critically endangered porpoise species. Illegal fishing with gillnets for another critically endangered species endemic to the Gulf of California, the totoaba (*Totoaba macdonaldii*), is linked to the decline of the vaquita.