

**Joint Statement of Marine Mammal Scientists
On Wind Farm Project Located at Critical Habitat for Cetaceans in Chile**

Mr. Sebastian Piñera
President of Republic of Chile

Ms. Maria Ignacia Benítez
Minister of Environment of Chile

Mr. Alfredo Moreno
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Chile

14 December, 2011

Dear President Piñera,

We, the undersigned marine mammal scientists, wish to express our concerns regarding the development of a large scale wind farm project to be located in the coastal borderline of the northwestern zone of Chiloe Island in Chile, an area internationally recognized as a critical habitat for a unique population of endangered blue whales, *Balaenoptera musculus*.

It is important to note that scientific evidence shows that the noise produced by wind farms construction and some maintenance activities can have negative impacts on marine mammals, for example through disturbance and exclusion; effects that can extend considerable distances.

Other potential impacts include habitat change and pollution from leaks or spills (e.g. hydraulic fluids) that also may affect cetacean species and have effects on their prey.

Even though the wind farm is expected to be installed on shore, such impacts still may affect marine mammals. Furthermore, the associated construction of new ports in a fragile ecosystem that supports a number of cetacean populations is of great concern, particularly because it raises the probability of collisions with large vessels. In addition, noise pollution generated by large ships also can disturb the animals and generate masking effects that interfere in their communication system and behaviours, such as the ability to find food.

The negative impacts of wind farms have been recognized by the European Union (EU) stressing that it is critical to understand the abundance and distribution of species and their local habitat use, so that wind farms are not located in sensitive areas such as

breeding and feeding grounds, or migratory routes. The report of the EU also proposes that the most appropriate and successful form of mitigation to biodiversity from wind farms is to avoid sensitive sites and concentrations of sensitive species¹.

Northwestern Chiloe Island is internationally recognized as having one of the most important aggregations of blue whales currently known in the southern hemisphere. The species, classified as 'Endangered' by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), was drastically reduced by the whaling industry, driving its population close to extinction. After decades of protection, blue whales still are far from recovering to pre-whaling population levels. In this regard, the annual return rate of individual blue whales to the northwestern area of Chiloe Island highlights it as an important feeding ground for the population and a critical habitat for the life cycle of this endangered species.

Southern right whales (*Eubalaena australis*) also are found in the coastal waters of northwestern Chiloe Island. Considering that this specific population was recently classified as 'Critically Endangered' by IUCN because its current population could be less than 50 mature individuals, it is of great importance to afford maximum protection to the species in Chilean waters in order to avoid its extinction. Any anthropogenic removal would be very detrimental to the population. In addition, other species of interest, including Peale's dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus australis*) and humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), are also found in the coastal waters off northwestern Chiloe Island. All of these species are protected under Chilean law and international agreements.

In 2010, the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission strongly recommended that countries co-operate to limit impacts on marine wildlife from marine renewable development². In 2011 the Scientific Committee then strongly recommended to the government of Chile the urgent development of an Environmental Impact Assessment in this region and to reconsider locating the wind farm towers further away from the coastline³.

We believe it is critical to acknowledge and implement the recommendations of the Scientific Committee and grant special attention to mitigating potential impacts on cetaceans from the proposed wind farm project. Careful consideration should be given to selection of location for siting devices and port constructions in order to guarantee that sensitive areas or species are not affected.

Sincerely,

¹ European Commission. 2010. EU Guidance on wind energy development in accordance with the EU nature legislation. 116pp.

² International Whaling Commission. 2011. Report of the Scientific Committee. J. Cetacean Res. Manage. 13 (Suppl.)

³ International Whaling Commission. 2011. Report of the Scientific Committee. Annex K. Standing group on Environmental Concerns. http://www.iwcoffice.org/documents/sci_com/SCRepFiles2011/Annex%20K%20-%20E.pdf

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