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His Excellency Valery V. Loshchinin  
Ambassador and Permanent Representative  
Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to  
the United Nations Office and other International  
Organizations in Geneva  
Avenue de la Paix 15  
1211 Geneva 20  
Switzerland

19 May 2010

Your Excellency,

IUCN presents its compliments to the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations Organizations in Geneva and requests the assistance of the Mission in transmitting the enclosed letter to His Excellency Vladimir Putin, Prime Minister of the Federation via your diplomatic channels.

Please accept, Your Excellency, the assurance of my highest consideration.

Julia Marton-Lefèvre  
Director General  
IUCN - International Union for Conservation of Nature

Enclosure



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Mr. Vladimir Putin  
Prime Minister of Russia

19 May 2010

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing with a sense of urgency to request your intervention to help prevent a serious setback for animal conservation. As you are aware, IUCN has been engaged in the international effort to protect the critically endangered Western Gray Whale. This population depends on the near-shore waters of north-eastern Sakhalin Island as its principal summer and autumn feeding ground (please see <http://www.iucn.org/wgwap/>). Central to this effort is a panel of independent experts (the Western Gray Whale Advisory Panel, or WGWAP) convened by IUCN with support from Sakhalin Energy Investment Company. The WGWAP is currently in its fourth year of existence, and we at IUCN feel it has made significant progress towards ensuring that oil and gas activities on the north-eastern Sakhalin shelf are carried out in a manner that minimises risks to the whales.

The international scientific community and the International Whaling Commission regard noise from seismic surveys as a serious threat to whales. The greatest immediate threat to Western Gray Whales is the potential for disturbance of feeding and nursing by the Rosneft Lebedenskoie 3-D seismic survey directly in the feeding area. I understand that this survey is planned to begin in late July 2010 and to last through much of the critical feeding season for the whales, including the females and their calves.

Our most recent information is that rather than being concurrent, because of concerns about acoustic interference between the two, the Rosneft Lebedenskoie seismic survey will follow the Sakhalin Energy survey in sequence. The Lebedenskoie survey is likely to begin just as numbers of whales are arriving to feed in near-shore waters.

This is extremely worrying. The WGWAP has spent several years planning a mitigation and monitoring programme in close consultation with Sakhalin Energy (see <http://www.iucn.org/wgwap/>). It has repeatedly emphasised that the best mitigation is to conduct seismic surveys early in the open-water season, before many (if any) whales have arrived in their feeding area. In addition, other important mitigation and monitoring measures have been put in place for the Sakhalin Energy survey. In effect, there is only one relatively safe 'time slot' available for a seismic survey near the feeding area each year, i.e. very early in the season (early June to mid-July). Seismic surveys should only be conducted at that time and with comparable levels of mitigation to those designed for the Sakhalin Energy Astokh 4-D survey.



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I urge you to ensure that all companies operating in areas critical for Western Gray Whales meet their obligations and commitments to developing the oil and gas resources in an environmentally responsible manner. This means, among other things, that the Rosneft Lebedenskoie seismic survey should be postponed for at least a year and conducted as early in the open-water season as is feasible. IUCN and the WGWAP will be happy to assist in any way possible if requested.

I take this opportunity to thank the Government of the Russian Federation for its membership in IUCN, and assure you of our continued support in its conservation efforts.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Julia Marton-Lefèvre'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Julia Marton-Lefèvre  
Director General  
IUCN - International Union for Conservation of Nature