

Vidal, O. 1993. Aquatic Mammal Conservation in Latin America: Problems and Perspectives. *Conservation Biology*, Vol. 7, No. 4. (Dec.1993), pp. 788-795.

Abstract:

Management of renewable natural resources in developing countries has been hampered by a mix of socioeconomic and political difficulties that in turn have resulted in insufficient scientific knowledge, limited environmental awareness and education, and limited commitment to conservation. Aquatic mammals provide good examples. Despite the fact that about 65% of all known living species of aquatic mammals are found in Latin America (including 19 species found nowhere else), local and regional conservation efforts have developed only recently and are isolated. While management of the commercial exploitation of most baleen whales and pinnipeds has been more or less successfully achieved, the lack of comprehensive policies and conservation strategies for small cetaceans, manatees, and otters has allowed several species or populations to become threatened or even endangered. Threats incidental mortality in fisheries, direct exploitation for human consumption or for use as bait in other fisheries, and habitat loss and degradation. To illustrate these problems, several cases are briefly discussed: (1) the endangered vaquita (*Phocoena sinus*) in Mexico; (2) the tuna-dolphin problem in the eastern tropical Pacific; (3) the small cetacean fishery in Peru; and (4) the Amazon river dolphin (*Inia geoffrensis*). Because many aquatic mammal populations are shared by Latin American countries, international cooperation is critical to ensuring their long-term conservation.