

115 Actions to avert the extinction of Rice's whale (*Balaenoptera ricei*)

RECALLING IUCN Resolution 7.126 *Reinforcing the protection of marine mammals through regional cooperation* (Marseille, 2020) expressing concern that marine mammal species continue to be threatened by anthropogenic activities, including from bycatch, collisions with vessels, underwater noise and habitat loss;

RECALLING Resolution 3.068 *Undersea noise pollution* (Bangkok, 2004), Resolution 4.115 *Non-lethal utilization of whales* (Barcelona, 2008) and Resolution 7.113 *Restoring a peaceful and quiet ocean* (Marseille, 2020), calling on governments and IUCN Members to strengthen cetacean management and conservation;

RECOGNISING the efforts of the International Whaling Commission (IWC), the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and others to reduce anthropogenic impacts on cetaceans;

RECALLING the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which sets out the obligation on States to protect and preserve the marine environment;

NOTING that The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ classifies Rice's whale, a species resident in the Gulf of Mexico, as Critically Endangered;

CONCERNED that Rice's whale is a geographically and genetically distinct species that likely consists of 50 or fewer mature individuals, and that annual human-caused mortality and serious injury currently exceed sustainable levels;

ALARMED that Rice's whale habitat along the continental shelf break (100-to-400-meter depth) is inadequately protected and subject to anthropogenic disturbances, especially in the northwestern Gulf of Mexico, and that the species is threatened, inter alia, by vessel strikes, anthropogenic noise, oil spills and marine debris;

MINDFUL that Rice's whale calls were recently detected in Mexican waters for the first time, demonstrating the need for international collaboration to ensure effective conservation;

CONSCIOUS that further research is needed to address knowledge gaps, inform protections and better mitigate the risks faced by Rice's whales; and

CAUTIONING that any additional negative impact on Rice's whales could lead to their extinction;

The IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025, at its session in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates:

1. ENCOURAGES the range states to work with IUCN, IWC, CMS, IMO and other international bodies, on scientific research, mitigation, communication and financing to promote the species' recovery throughout its range;

2. URGES the range states to develop and implement coordinated national action plans for the conservation of Rice's whales and their habitat;

3. URGES the United States Government to:

a. implement a mandatory slowdown for offshore industry service vessels and large commercial ships to 10 knots, except as required for navigational safety, in Rice's whale habitat;

b. require operators of deep-penetration seismic surveys throughout the northern Gulf of Mexico to use best available noise-reduction technology; and

c. prevent future offshore industry developments from taking place within Rice's whale habitat;

4. CALLS ON IUCN Members to apply the CMS *Family Guidelines on Environmental Impact Assessments for Marine Noise-generating Activities* (2017), the IMO *Revised guidelines for the reduction of underwater radiated noise from shipping to address adverse impacts on marine life* (2023), and other guidelines where relevant; and

5. ALSO CALLS ON IUCN Members to support the implementation of the IMO Action Plan for the Reduction of Underwater Noise from Commercial Shipping, and to develop mandatory regulations for the design and operation of quieter vessels.