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PRESS RELEASE
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**Renewed Threat to the Environment and Commercial Divers of Puerto Peñasco
Posed by the Sandy Beach Marina**

The Intercultural Center for the Study of Deserts and Oceans, CEDO, is issuing this alert about a renewed threat to the environment and commercial divers of Puerto Peñasco. In January of this year, CEDO wrote about a marina proposed by the Sandy Beach Resorts. These plans implied the destruction of the La Choya Estuary and the rocky reef located in front of the Reef Restaurant. CEDO, along with researchers, fishermen, and members of the Tohono O'odham nation petitioned the environmental authorities to not authorize this project. The arguments against approval were based on the impacts the project would have on the environment, the local culture and fisheries, and an incomplete and incorrect Environmental Impact Study.

After reviewing the analysis of the specialists and taking into account the opinions of the various interested sectors of the community, the Secretary of the Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT) determined that the project's environmental impact study was inadequate and that the project had very serious environmental and social implications. For these reasons, the secretary recommended that the developer withdraw the study. Subsequently, Sandy Beach Resorts withdrew its request and suspended the authorization process for the project.

This victory for the fishing community, native peoples and the environment did not last long. The developer modified the project and renewed the application for approval of the environmental impact study. This new proposal claims to study the actual impacts of the new project and proposes actions to mitigate them, nevertheless, many of these improvements are not real and the mitigation actions are inadequate. For example, they now state that the area of the project does not include Estero La Choya, yet they propose to use the estero to dump the material dredged up in the construction of two marinas: a "residential" marina and a freshwater marina. This is not logical.

The principal impacts that this marina would cause and that were identified during the revision of the Environmental Impact Study include: 1) the destruction of the rocky reef that is habitat for three protected invertebrate species (**rock scallop** (*Spondylus calcifer*), **sea cucumber** (*Isostichopus fuscus*), **mother of pearl** (*Pinctada mazatlanica*)), equivalent to 8% of the protected marine invertebrates in Mexico; 2) modification of the direction and volume of currents which could cause erosion of the beaches on one side of the marina and an accumulation of sediments on the other side, modification in the

patterns of larval dispersion for fish and invertebrates, increased turbidity of the water etc.; 3) loss of a very important area for the commercial divers' fishery that is a national model for a sustainable fishery of rock scallop; and finally, 4) an impact on various species of fish, invertebrates, reptiles and marine mammals that are protected by law.

A review committee has provided to SEMARNAT an evaluation of the project and has recommended that it NOT be approved. Also, internationally renowned Mexican researchers, the Cooperative of Divers of Puerto Peñasco, winners of the National Conservation Award in Mexico 2003, have communicated their comments and requests to the Secretary.

Approval of the construction of this marina by SEMARNAT would represent a violation of environmental legislation. Therefore, we are confident that the authorities will make a correct decision based on reliable scientific information.

CEDO is committed to finding ways for Puerto Peñasco to develop and grow in an orderly manner that guards its natural resources and those who depend upon them. It is indispensable that those who plan projects that affect critical habitats and/or economic activities join with all interested parties and together find a way to minimize negative impacts to the environment.

For more information, contact Alejandro Castillo (CEDO's Coordinator of Sustainable Development and Coastal Conservation) by email at alejandro@cedointercultural.org or by telephone at 520-829-4501 (from the US) or 638 382 0113 (from Mexico).