

FINAL PRESS RELEASE

6 July 2000

2000 Annual Meeting,
Adelaide, Australia

The 52nd Annual Meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) was held from 3-6 July 2000 in Adelaide, Australia. The proceedings were conducted by the Chairman, Mr. Michael Canny (Ireland) and the Vice-Chairman, Mr Bo Fernholm (Sweden).

Catch limits for commercial whaling

In 1982, the Commission took a decision, which came into force from the 1986 and 1985/86 seasons, that catch limits for all commercial whaling would be set to zero.

Norway has lodged objections to the ban and has exercised its right to set national catch limits for its coastal whaling operations for minke whales.

As in previous years, the Commission did not adopt a proposal by Japan for an interim relief allocation of 50 minke whales to be taken by coastal community-based whaling. However, the Commission did pass by majority a Resolution reaffirming the Commission's commitment to work expeditiously to alleviate the distress caused by the cessation of minke whaling to the communities of Abashiri, Ayukawa, Wadoura and Taiji.

Revised Management Scheme

Although the Commission has accepted and endorsed the Revised Management Procedure (RMP) for commercial whaling, it has noted that work on a number of issues, including specification of an inspection and observer system must be completed before the Commission will consider establishing catch limits other than zero. This work is ongoing. The Commission passed a Resolution by consensus with some reservations, to further this work which will include the holding of an intersessional Working Group meeting in February 2001.

In 1997, Ireland introduced a proposal for discussion intended to lead to a break in the deadlock between the governments opposed to a resumption of commercial whaling and those in favour. Its elements include: completion and adoption of the Revised Management Scheme; designation of a global sanctuary for whales; permission for closely regulated and monitored coastal whaling within 200 mile zones by communities with a long tradition for such activity; prohibition of international trade in whale products; and the cessation of scientific research catches. Reaching consensus on such a package of measures is proving extremely difficult, but many Commissioners expressed their interest in continuing discussions and the Commission agreed to keep this Item on its Agenda.

Catch limits for aboriginal subsistence whaling

The Commission has agreed to the following catch limits for several stocks subject to aboriginal subsistence whaling.

Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Seas stock of bowhead whales (taken by Alaskan Eskimos and native peoples of Chukotka) - The total number of landed whales for the years 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002 shall not exceed 280 whales, with no more than 67 whales struck in any year (up to 15 unused strikes may be carried over each year).

Eastern North Pacific gray whales (taken by those whose "traditional, aboriginal and subsistence needs have been recognised") - A total catch of 620 whales is allowed for the years 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002 with a maximum of 140 in any one year.

West Greenland fin whales (taken by Greenlanders) - An annual catch of 19 whales is allowed for the years 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002.

West Greenland minke whales (taken by Greenlanders) - The annual number of whales struck for the years 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002, shall not exceed 175 (up to 15 unused strikes may be carried over each year).

East Greenland minke whales (taken by Greenlanders) - An annual catch of 12 whales is allowed for the years 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002 (up to 3 unused strikes may be carried over each year).

Humpback whales (taken by St Vincent and The Grenadines) - for the seasons 2000 to 2002, the annual catch shall not exceed two whales.

The taking of calves or females accompanied by calves is forbidden. The Scientific Committee continued to make progress towards developing new management regimes for aboriginal subsistence whaling; this work has been given high priority by the Commission.

Status of whales

Despite a long period of protection, several populations of great whales remain highly endangered and number 500 or less. These include all bowhead whale stocks apart from the Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Seas stock that numbers over 7,000; gray whales in the western Pacific (those in the eastern Pacific, by contrast, number over 20,000); all stocks of northern right whales; and various stocks of blue whales. Some of these small Arctic bowhead populations are subjected to direct catches outside IWC regulations (a bowhead was taken in 1998 by Canadian Eskimos), or are killed by ship strikes or are bycaught in fishing gear. The Scientific Committee will consider their status as a priority subject next year. The Commission passed by majority a Resolution calling on the Government of Canada not to authorise takes from such stocks. The Commission also passed a Resolution by consensus on the western North Atlantic right whale, which numbers only around 300 animals, on measures needed to reduce human-induced mortality.

Scientific permit catches

Two proposed permits by Japan were considered. One is an extension of its continuing programme in the Southern Hemisphere (now 400-10% minke whales from the Antarctic). The second is for a two-year feasibility study primarily aimed at feeding ecology in the context of contributing to the 'conservation and sustainable use of marine living resources in the western North Pacific, especially within Japan's EEZ.' The programme proposes the taking of 100 minke whales, 50 Bryde's whales and 10 sperm whales in the western North Pacific. The issuance of such permits is a sovereign right under the Convention. The Commission adopted Resolutions by majority calling on the Government of Japan to refrain from issuing these permits and reiterated that in reviewing scientific permits, the Scientific Committee should examine whether the research is required for management or could be carried out using non-lethal means.

Whale killing methods and associated welfare issues

Last year, the Commission had passed a Resolution that encouraged nations to supply relevant data on killing times and related issues in future years and also to provide technical assistance to reduce time to unconsciousness and death in aboriginal subsistence fisheries. This year the Commission reviewed progress in the context of the revised 'Action Plan' developed by the Commission last year.

Environmental research

In recent years, the Commission has strengthened its commitment to research on environmental changes and the effects on cetaceans. In particular, last year, it provided 'seed funding' of \$126,000 for two major collaborative research initiatives made by its Scientific Committee with respect to (1) chemical pollutants (POLLUTION 2000+) and (2) baleen whale habitat and prey studies in co-operation with CCAMLR and Southern Ocean GLOBEC (SOWER 2000). However, these programmes require considerably more funding if they are to succeed. Although the Commission has provided more money for the coming year, Governments and others are requested to provide additional funding.

The Commission also continued its review of aspects of human health issues related to cetacean products. It passed a Resolution by consensus with some reservations calling upon governments to take measures to reduce emission of chemical pollutants.

Small cetaceans

Notwithstanding the different views of member countries over the legal competence of the IWC to manage small cetaceans, the Contracting Governments continue to co-operate in consideration of small cetaceans, particularly with respect to the work of the Scientific Committee. The Committee's main topic this year was to consider the status of freshwater dolphins. A Resolution on this matter was agreed by consensus with some reservations.

Co-operation with other organisations

The Commission noted the importance of co-operation with other organisations, particularly in the context of scientific research. Further research co-operation with a number of organisations (including The Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic and North Seas (ASCOBANS); The Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS); International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES); Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR); and Southern Ocean GLOBEC (SO-GLOBEC)) has been strengthened this year. In particular, the Commission has agreed a Memorandum of Understanding with CMS.

Establishment of a new scientific journal

Last year, the Commission was pleased to announce a major new scientific journal, The Journal of Cetacean Research and Management. In addition to the three issues of the Journal, the supplement containing the Scientific Committee report and the first special issue Chemical Pollutants and Cetaceans were also published.

The Secretary

The Commission honoured Ray Gambell, who was retiring as Secretary after 24 years and longer service still as a member of its Scientific Committee and a friend to all he encountered. He and his staff had served the Committee with efficiency, diligence and good humour throughout that time. He had established and run a Secretariat that was widely acknowledged as one of the best of its kind. The Commission wished him well for the future and presented him with a print of an 18th century sperm whale fishery.

The Commission also offered its congratulations and best wishes to its new Secretary, Dr Nicola Grandy.

Chairman and Vice-Chairman

The Commission thanked the out-going Chairman, Mr Michael Canny from Ireland for his wise leadership at a difficult time for the Commission. Prof. Bo Fernholm (Sweden) was elected Chairman and Mr Henrik Fischer (Denmark) was elected Vice-Chairman.

Date and place of the next Annual Meeting

The next Annual Meeting will be held in London in July 2001. The 2002 meeting will be held in Japan.