

IUCN statement to the IWC Intersessional Meeting Rome 9 to 11 March on the Future of IWC

Thank you, Mr Chairman, for the opportunity to address this meeting. Like previous speakers we are encouraged that Commission members are making an effort to resolve their differences, so that the organisation can focus its energies on addressing important cetacean conservation issues instead of internal divisions. We greatly appreciate the efforts of Ambassador de Soto and yourself, Mr Chairman, to develop proposals that might be acceptable to all parties.

In situations like this, where previous negotiations have reached an impasse, there is often a case for going back to the drawing board, and trying to start afresh without feeling bound to previous approaches.

However, we are disconcerted by the direction these negotiations seem to be taking. IUCN places especial emphasis on finding scientifically based solutions to conservation problems, with the involvement of stakeholders. To date, we have found the IWC to be a relatively science-friendly organisation, and we have been impressed by the work done by its Scientific Committee. The Committee over the years has made substantial progress towards solving the difficult problem of how to determine sustainable catch levels, and is relatively advanced in this field when seen in the context of fisheries and wildlife management in general.

We are concerned that the Commission may be setting aside the achievements of the Scientific Committee and returning to the practices of the past, when whales were horsetraded in political deals between the parties, to the detriment of their conservation. While it is encouraging that the Chair's Suggestions in Document 4 do envisage receiving some advice from the Scientific Committee, the questions that it envisages putting to the Committee are naive. The Committee would be asked to comment on the effects of a given catch level to be taken either for just five years, or for an indefinite period.

The Committee's extensive work on these issues over the years has shown that for long-lived species such as whales, which are hard to monitor, one cannot meaningfully assess sustainability over a period as short as five years. The answer to the question of the effect of a given catch over five years will simply be that there would be x00 fewer whales left in the

stock than if the catch had not been taken. The Commission would be left to decide whether it thought that mattered or not.

As to the effect of taking a given catch level indefinitely, the scientific answer is that there is a high risk that a constant catch level is unsustainable, unless it is an extremely small catch. Extensive work by the Committee over the years has shown that a constant catch level, apart from a trivially small one, engenders risks to whale stocks.

Instead, one needs a procedure for continually adjusting the catch level in the light of new data. The Scientific Committee has over the years developed comprehensive machinery for this purpose in the form of the RMP and its implementation variants. Rather than try to develop an alternative approach from scratch, we would recommend using the machinery that has already been developed by the Committee.

The proposals appear to contradict themselves to the extent that on the one hand they indicate that catch level would be based on scientific advice, while on the other hand they suggest that catch limits in the North Pacific could be increased as a reward for reducing whaling in the Southern Hemisphere. If catch limits are based on what the scientists estimate to be sustainable, then there can be no scope for increasing them as a *quid pro quo* for restraint exercised elsewhere in the world. We shouldn't forget that the Commission's charter, the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling, specifies that its management measures should be based on scientific findings.

Finally we emphasise the importance of the Commission continuing to broaden its scientific approach focus to cover not just the effects of whaling, but all the risks to which cetacean populations are subject to today. In this connection we draw attention to document 6 which contains many constructive suggestions for progress.