

**WWF STATEMENT
INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION INTERSESSIONAL MEETING
London, United Kingdom, 6-8 March 2008**

Today, populations of nearly all the great whales are at depressed levels, a legacy of unsustainable whaling during the last two centuries. As long-lived mammals with slow reproductive cycles whales inevitably take several decades or more to recover from population depletion. Some populations still survive as a few hundred individuals at the brink of extinction - others are believed to be recovering to healthier levels, although whale population estimates nearly always have a very large margin of uncertainty.

WWF's goal is to ensure that viable populations of all cetacean species occupy their historical range, and fulfill their role in maintaining the integrity of ocean ecosystems. WWF acknowledges the widely varied cultural attitudes toward the conservation and management of whales, but continues to oppose commercial whaling—now and until whale stocks have fully recovered, and the governments of the world have brought whaling fully under international control with a precautionary and conservation-based enforceable management and compliance system adhered to by all whaling nations.

WWF looks forward to working cooperatively with all governments and stakeholders with an interest in whales and whaling. WWF supports a resolution to the current impasse in the IWC which is not providing the solutions for whale conservation that are so urgently needed, and hopes governments can find a common way forward to ensure a secure and sustainable future for the world's whales.

THE IWC'S ROLE IN CETACEAN CONSERVATION

WWF supports the inclusion of conservation items on the agenda of the IWC as essential components of the Commission. WWF urges the IWC to take action rapidly to address significant threats facing cetaceans globally, such as bycatch, ship strikes, oil and gas exploration and development, climate change and habitat degradation by further supporting programmes of action to reduce these threats.

Climate Change: There is now unequivocal evidence that climate change is happening, and that it is largely due to human activities. The impact of climate change on cetaceans is expected to be diverse and is not well understood, but is projected to decrease the range of all cetaceans species listed as threatened by the IUCN for which predictions can be made. WWF notes a detailed briefing on this topic that was released during IWC60 by WWF and WDCS entitled "*Whales in hot water*". It is now critical that the Commission and its contracting governments prioritize climate change as a critical issue for further research and action by supporting (financially and otherwise) the global workshop on climate change impacts on cetaceans.

Bycatch: the greatest global threat to cetaceans: Bycatch is fast becoming the greatest threat to many cetacean species. Previous estimates show that more than 300,000 cetaceans are killed in fishing gear each year. WWF urges the Contracting Governments to adhere to existing resolutions on bycatch reduction, and to support additional concrete action by sponsoring a series of research and training workshops in developing nations with high rates of cetacean bycatch. Only through swift and cooperative international action to reduce bycatch will some critically endangered cetacean populations be saved. In addition, WWF urges members of the Scientific Committee and all other interested parties to engage with 'SmartGear', WWF's international fishing gear competition, which awards prizes from \$10,000 to \$30,000 for the most practical, innovative fishing gear designs that reduce bycatch (www.smartgear.org)

NEEDLESS LETHAL RESEARCH

Although the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling contains a provision that allows governments to issue their own lethal research permits, it was written more than 60 years ago, at a time when no practical alternatives existed, and long before the advent of modern conservation biology and scientific methodologies. At that time, killing whales was unfortunately the only way to learn some of the most basic biological information, some of which was then used to set catch quotas. Today, modern scientific non-lethal techniques have been developed that provide the data required for whale management, which are not provided through Japan's whaling programme.

President: HE Chief Emeka Anyaoku Director General: James P Leape President Emeritus: HRH The Duke of Edinburgh	Registered as: WWF-World Wide Fund For Nature, WWF-Fondo Mondiale per la Natura WWF-Fondo Mundial para la Naturaleza, WWF-Fonds Mondial pour la Nature WWF-Welt Natur Fonds. Also known as World Wildlife Fund
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WWF calls on the Government of Japan to stop abusing the special whaling permit provision of the ICRW by conducting commercial whaling under the guise of research. We urge Japan to bring its research efforts into the 21st Century through the use of existing non-lethal techniques. WWF believes the Contracting Governments of the IWC must ensure that IWC-related research meets modern accepted scientific techniques, so that the IWC's credibility on this issue is maintained. The continued abuses of Japan's whaling programme are an affront to legitimate science.

SANCTUARY FOR WHALES

WWF also urges the IWC to act to stop whaling in whale sanctuaries. Sanctuaries were established by the IWC itself to allow scientists to study whales in the absence of whaling. Japan's continued abuse of the scientific whaling provisions of the ICRW, by whaling in the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary, is not acceptable. Furthermore, WWF believes that the time has come for the contracting governments of the IWC to take all necessary action to end all whaling in the Southern Ocean—all whaling, of any kind, by any nation.

FUTURE OF THE IWC

WWF believes that the IWC has an important contribution to make to the conservation of all cetaceans. However, the IWC as currently constituted omits several elemental aspects of modern environmental governance such as references to the precautionary principle, an ecosystem approach, integrated management and other governance mechanisms that are crucial to provide a framework of cooperation.

This intersessional meeting recognizes that the IWC is at a crossroads. The time has come for frank discussions among governments, with a focus on the future of whale conservation. WWF believes that the contracting governments have a choice: to continue the same discussions, with potentially disastrous consequences for whale conservation, or to show the world community they can move forward.

The ICRW is on the one hand an outdated instrument tied not only to an era which had little understanding of the complex web of marine issues facing all cetaceans, but also to a very different political era than the one in which it exists today. It was negotiated at a time before the broad range of threats to cetaceans was understood, and indeed before some of today's threats were recognized to exist, *e.g.* climate change, ship strikes, gear entanglement, and toxic waste disposal. There have of course been many IWC successes. However, in the more than 60 years since the Convention text was adopted, it has become impossible to separate the threats presented by commercial whaling from those of marine pollution, commercial bycatch or overfishing. It would be far preferable, and of greater potential conservation benefit to cetaceans, to now address all of the threats to cetacean populations in a broad, multilateral context.

The issues before the IWC today are: whether or not it can evolve into an instrument that addresses these broader conservation issues, or it will remain mired in the past; whether or not some member states will continue to engage in unregulated commercial whaling, thereby precluding further intergovernmental progress to address the broad range of threats to cetaceans; whether or not commercial whaling that is an affront to the legitimacy of 21st century science will be allowed to continue; and whether or not the member states are willing to seize the opportunity, and turn the IWC into a meaningful conservation instrument. The opportunity is before you today.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

We are aware that there is a divergence of views at the IWC, particularly between whaling countries and their supporters, and non-whaling countries. Rather than focus on these differences, WWF encourages countries to try to find common ground, and work for the conservation of whales and other cetaceans. The world is watching to see if the IWC will indeed move forward or backwards. WWF wishes all participants a productive meeting.