

## PRESS RELEASE: DAY 1

The 64<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) began this morning at the El Panama Hotel and Conference Centre, Panama City. The meeting was opened by the Interim Chair, Herman Oosthuizen (South Africa). The welcome address was provided by His Excellency Roberto Henriquez, Minister of Foreign Affairs for Panama. Also present were: His Excellency Salomon Shamah, Minister of Tourism; His Excellency Francisco Alvarez de Soto, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs; and the Honourable Giovanni Lauri, Administrator of Aquatic Resources. Simon Brockington, the Secretary to the Commission, responded on behalf of the IWC.

The meeting itself will be Chaired by Bruno Mainini (Switzerland). Elections for the vacant Chair and Vice-Chair of the Commission will be held at the end of the meeting.

The adopted agenda is given as [IWC/64/1](#). The first item of business discussed was the **South Atlantic Sanctuary** (Item4). The proposal to establish a Sanctuary in these waters has been discussed for several years. The proposal can be found as [IWC/64/8 rev1](#). After some discussion the proposal was put a vote. In order to be adopted, the proposal required a three-quarters majority of those voting. The final vote was 38 in favour, 28 against and 2 abstentions. Thus the proposal did not achieve the required majority.

The Commission then had a short discussion and exchange of views under its Item 5 '**the IWC in the Future**'. There was no action arising.

In the afternoon, the Commission heard the report of its Scientific Committee ([IWC/64/Rep1](#)) on the status of a number of whale stocks (Item 6).

The first of these was the **Antarctic minke whale**. After several years, the Committee has completed the reanalysis of the extensive data from the long series of data from the IWC's IDCR and SOWER cruises. Total circumpolar estimates were agreed of about 720,000 for the period 1985/86-1990/91 (known as CPII) and 515,000 for the period 1992/93-2003/04 (known as CPIII). When corrected for survey area, there is a decline of about 30% but this is not statistically significant. The Committee is now examining ways to determine if there is a true decline and if so what is the cause.

The next stocks considered were the **Southern Hemisphere humpback whales**, where the Committee's focus is on addressing the status of the animals that breed off eastern Australia, Oceania and French Polynesia. This work will be completed in 2014. The Committee also received information from scientists working on humpback whales from Panama, Costa Rica and Ecuador. Photo-identification is a powerful tool to understanding many aspects of whale biology and abundance. The Committee's ongoing Antarctic humpback whale catalogue now has over 4,600 identified animals.

The Committee completed a circumpolar assessment of blue whales in 2008. At that time, **Antarctic blue whales** remained at a few percent of their pre-exploitation size although they were thankfully increasing at around 7% per year. The Committee is now examining whether it will be possible to assess populations separately. An important contributor to the Committee's work on this species is the Southern Ocean Research Partnership's (SORP's) [Antarctic Blue Whale Project](#). The Committee also received papers on Chilean blue whales and pygmy blue whales off Australia.

Special attention was paid again this year to **gray whales in the western North Pacific**, whose feeding grounds coincide with major oil and gas operations off Sakhalin Island, Russian Federation. The population numbers only about 140 animals. A [satellite telemetry programme](#) undertaken for two years under the auspices of the IWC has found that all four whales for which the tags lasted unexpectedly moved across to the eastern Pacific; the tag lasted long enough on one animal for it to be tracked to the Mexican breeding grounds and then back to Sakhalin. Another programme under the auspices of the IWC found 14 matches between Mexico and Sakhalin Island. This international collaboration to examine stock structure and investigate conservation implications is continuing. The Committee has great concern over the possible threats to this population from oil and gas activities. It recommended that all companies implement appropriate monitoring and mitigation plans. The Committee welcomed the efforts of Japan to reduce bycatch mortality of gray whales in its waters. Finally, the Committee acknowledged the important work of the IUCN Western Gray Whale Advisory Panel and recommended continuation of the Panel beyond 2011.

The Committee held a [workshop](#) in Buenos Aires in September 2011 on **Southern Hemisphere right whales**. The Committee reviewed the report and endorsed a number of science and conservation-related matters, especially related to the importance of continued long-term monitoring and the provision of data on ship strikes and entanglements. The issue of Conservation Management Plans for two stocks will come later in the Commission's deliberations.

Ship strikes and entanglements are a threat to the endangered **western North Atlantic right whale** population which numbers around 400 animals. Five deaths and eleven entanglement cases were reported off the US coast between November 2009 and October 2010. The Committee again expressed grave concern over this and other small stocks.

One poorly understood area is the eastern North Pacific. The IWC has developed a research programme called **IWC-POWER** (North Pacific Ocean Whale and Ecosystem Research) and is now in the third year of the initial phase of the programme (see [SC/64/Rep1](#)). An IWC-designed survey with international researchers will be undertaking a 60-day research cruise with the generous donation of a vessel by Japan. The cruise will focus on systematic sightings, biopsy sampling and photo-identification work.

That completed the first part of the Scientific Committee's report to the Commission. The Commission endorsed those parts of the report and its recommendations.

A major part of the Commission's work this year (Item 7) is the renewal of **aboriginal subsistence whaling (ASW) quotas** for the hunts undertaken by the USA (bowhead and gray whales), Russian Federation (gray and bowhead whales), Denmark/Greenland (common minke, fin, humpback and bowhead whales) and St Vincent and The Grenadines (humpback whales). The present limits can be found [here](#). Yesterday afternoon, the Commission received the [report](#) of its Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling Sub-Committee. In determining ASW limits, the Commission via this sub-committee, initially, receives the report of the Scientific Committee on the sustainability of proposed catches and the statements of 'need' from the countries with such hunts explaining their cultural, nutritional and subsistence needs. It is on this basis, the Commission sets limits. The ASW sub-committee received and endorsed the Scientific Committee's report on the status of these stocks, noting that the Committee had stated that all of the proposed hunts (see [IWC/64/10](#) and [IWC/64/12](#)) were acceptable from a conservation standpoint. The primary discussions in the ASW sub-committee

concerned the need statements for the Greenland hunts and the hunt by St Vincent and The Grenadines. Discussions of the proposals are continuing and the Commission will hear from the countries proposing limits on the morning of the second day.

## PRESS RELEASE DAY 2

The Commission began the morning by resuming its discussions of aboriginal subsistence whaling. The initial focus was on a proposal for renewed limits at the same level as before for the hunts of Bering-Chukchi- Beaufort Seas bowhead whales (by the USA and Russian Federation), eastern North Pacific gray whales (by the Russian Federation and the USA) and western North Atlantic humpback whales (St Vincent and The Grenadines). Given the proposed move to biennial meetings, the quota block had been extended to six years. The full text of the proposal can be found in [IWC/64/10](#).

After considerable discussion focussing on the St Vincent and The Grenadines hunt, the proposal, which required a three-quarters majority as it was an amendment to the Commission's Schedule was adopted by 48 votes to 10. Voting details can be found [HERE](#).

The Commission then heard a presentation and had an initial discussion of the proposal by Denmark/Greenland for its hunts of common minke whales, fin whales, humpback whales and bowhead whales. The presentation summarised information it had provided in [IWC/64/ASW7](#) and [IWC/64/ASW8](#). Greenland's proposal for limits are given in [IWC/64/12](#). The limits are the same for common minke whales and bowhead whales. They involve an increase of 1 humpback whale and 9 fin whales per year compared to the previous block limits.

There was considerable discussion over the presentation and the proposal. The Chair noted that given the differing views expressed, he would hold the agenda item over to allow for further discussions amongst parties.

The Commission therefore moved to Item 8, the report of the Conservation Committee. The report is given as [IWC/64/Rep5](#). The Scientific Committee had reported on its progress on several of the items on the Conservation Committee's agenda.

Before discussing its agenda, the Conservation Committee had remembered the Commissioner for Belgium, Alexandre de Lichtervelde, who died in 2011. His enthusiasm and contribution to the Commission's work, especially but not exclusively related to his leadership of the Ship Strikes Working Group, was a great inspiration and he will be greatly missed by the Commission.

The Conservation Committee had an extensive agenda this year. The first item was to review progress in trying to determine the cause of the 'stinky' inedible gray whales that affects up to 10% of the Chukotkan aboriginal subsistence hunt in the Russian Federation. The cause remains unknown but the Commission supports continued work on this issue.

The next topic addressed was that of ship strikes. This has been discussed for a number of years and the Commission has established a [global database on ship strikes](#). The Scientific Committee reviewed new information on this topic from the Arabian Sea and Sri Lanka. In order to further the database it recommended the appointment of a ship strike data co-ordinator. The Commission was pleased to hear of progress on mitigation measures from a number of countries, including the introduction of traffic separation schemes by the USA and Panama. It also welcomed information on an international workshop in Spain on maritime biodiversity and maritime transport ([IWC/64/CC18](#)). The Commission also agreed to hold joint workshops with UNEP and SPAW-RAC on disentanglement and ship strikes in the wider Caribbean ([IWC/64/WKM&AW12rev1](#)).

The next topic reported by the Conservation Committee in fact related to Commission Item 10, Whalewatching.

The Scientific Committee has been examining scientific issues around whalewatching for a number of years. It continues to assess potential and actual impacts of whalewatching operations and encourages research on this. This year the Conservation Committee finalised its 5-year strategic plan which was endorsed by the Commission.

The Commission was pleased to receive additional information on the endangered Chile-Peru population of southern right whales which was also considered under the Item 9, Conservation Management Plans (CMPs). CMPs are a valuable conservation tool agreed by the Commission. This year, the Commission endorsed two draft CMPs – one on right whales in the Southwest Atlantic ([IWC/64/CC7 rev 1](#)) and one on right whales in the Southeast Pacific ([IWC/64/CC9](#)). It has previously endorsed a draft Conservation Management Plan on western North Pacific gray whales. Initial scientific work is being undertaken on a possible future CMP for humpback whales in the Arabian Sea.

The Commission was pleased to receive national reports on conservation from nine member countries (see [IWC/64/Rep5](#)).

The Commission also noted the potential and actual threats to cetaceans from marine debris. It has endorsed a joint Scientific Committee and the Conservation Committee workshop on this topic.

Finally, the Commission welcomed the information from nine research and conservation programmes that had been funded from the IWC's Voluntary Fund for Small Cetacean Conservation Research. These projects all have strong conservation and capacity building components. The Commission also greatly welcomed announcement of new donations totalling over £30,000 from Italy, Netherlands and the UK, as well as some non-governmental organisations.

The Commission then adjourned for the day.

### PRESS RELEASE DAY 3

The Commission began the morning by discussing, Item 11, the report of the Whale Killing Methods and Associated Animal Welfare Issues ([IWC/64/Rep6](#)). The Commission was pleased to receive information from four whaling countries on their operations and one country reported on the euthanasia of stranded animals.

The Commission warmly endorsed the second IWC workshop on welfare issues associated with the entanglement of large whales ([IWC/64/WKM&AWI Rep 1](#)). In particular it (1) adopted a set of Principles and Guidelines for Entanglement Response; (2) is offering the global network of entanglement response operations and (3) has a recommended approach to capacity building and training, including future collaborative work with UNEP-SPAW in the wider Caribbean. The Committee also agreed future collaborative steps promoting good animal welfare including a future expert workshop on euthanasia.

The Commission then turned to Item 12 on its agenda, 'socio-economic implications and small-type whaling'. As it has in the past, Japan reiterated its concern over the hardship suffered by its four community-based whaling communities since the implementation of the commercial whaling moratorium. It introduced an outline of a proposed Schedule amendment to permit the catching of minke whales from the Okhotsk Sea-West Pacific Stock by small-type whaling vessels. It did not include a proposed catch number. There was an exchange of views but no consensus was reached and the item was closed.

Item 13 on the agenda relates to what is termed the Revised Management Procedure. This refers to the Scientific Committee's technical work on examining certain stocks in the context of removals including direct catches as well as bycatches and ship strikes.

The Commission then turned to Item 14, 'Scientific Permits'. Special permit catches have long been a controversial issue amongst member nations. A proposal by the Scientific Committee for a final review of the completed Icelandic programme will be decided upon later in the meeting under financial matters. At present, only Japan carries out special permit whaling. This is in the western North Pacific and the Antarctic. However, the Republic of Korea announced its intention to undertake special permit whaling, stating that later this year it may put forward a proposal for consideration by the Scientific Committee under the Committee's review process. A number of countries reiterated their objections to or support for this kind of whaling.

The next Item, Item 15 concerned the question of safety at sea. The Commission has on several occasions strongly condemned dangerous activity in the Southern Ocean. Last year, the Commission agreed a consensus [Resolution](#). The Resolution *inter alia* reiterated that the Commission, while recognising the right to peaceful protest, condemned actions that are a risk to human life and property. It agreed that this was not the way to pursue the resolution of different view regarding whales and whaling. It encouraged all governments to fulfil their obligations under IMO and UNCLOS. The Commission was again disturbed to receive reports of continuing dangerous activity in the Southern Ocean.

The Commission received a short report on information on catches provided by non-member nations. It welcomed information provided by Canada but noted that no information was available from Indonesia.

The Committee then received and adopted the report of its Infractions sub-committee ([IWC/64/Rep4 rev1](#)).

Finally, on Day 3, the Commission began to address Item 18, 'environmental and health issues'. It received the SOCER report that examined environmental issues and cetaceans in the Indian Ocean ([SC/64/E2](#)). The Commission then welcomed an update on Phase II of its POLLUTION 2000+ research programme. This is examining the complex question of population level effects of chemical pollutants on cetaceans. The Commission also welcomed the Scientific Committee's continuing work examining the effects of disease on cetaceans and on the question of capacity building and guidelines on oil spill response and prevention. The Commission was also pleased to receive the report of a scientific workshop on the interactions between marine renewable developments (wind farms, tidal stream devices and wave energy converters) and cetaceans ([SC/64/Rep6](#)). It endorsed its recommendations including a general strategy and principles to minimise environmental threats posed by such developments.

The final item discussed on Day 3 related to anthropogenic noise. This has been a long-standing issue and the Scientific Committee focussed this year on further scientific work to identify geographical and species-specific areas of concern, effects on cetaceans and on collaboration with the International maritime Organisation on reducing vessel noise.

This concludes Day 3.

#### PRESS RELEASE DAY 4

The Commission began the morning by resuming the discussions of the previous day on environmental and health matters. It received the report of the Scientific Committee (IWC/64/Rep1) on progress with issues related to climate change and cetaceans and ecosystem modelling. The Commission agreed to hold a workshop on Anthropogenic Impacts of Cetaceans in the Arctic in spring 2013. After an initial constructive discussion of matters relating to both cetacean and human health, the Commission broke its discussions to allow time to for the text of a revised resolution to be completed and put later to the meeting.

The Commission then returned to discussion of the aboriginal subsistence whaling limits for the Greenlandic hunts. It was not possible to achieve consensus on the request by Greenland (IWC/64/12). The Greenlandic proposal was therefore put to a vote and was defeated by 25 to 34 votes with 3 abstentions. The Chair expressed his regret at the impasse. The agenda item was closed.

The Commission then considered a number of administrative matters including the possibility of moving to biennial meetings. These discussions will be completed tomorrow.

The next Commission Item discussed was Item 19.1, 'small cetaceans'. The Scientific Committee's priority topic this year had been a review of the 10 beaked whale species found in the North Pacific and northern Indian Ocean. These populations are not well understood and the Committee made a number of recommendations to improve knowledge. Their vulnerability to military sonar and to seismic surveys was highlighted, as was the problem of bycatch. The need for effective mitigation was stressed.

The Committee then discussed the critically endangered species, the vaquita that lives in the Upper Gulf of California, Mexico. It numbered only about 220 animals in 2008 and continues to decline. It reaffirmed that the only reliable approach for saving the species is to eliminate vaquita bycatch in entangling fishing gear. It strongly recommend that, if extinction is to be avoided, all gillnets should be removed from the upper Gulf of California immediately. A number of countries echoed the Committee's concern and while recognising Mexico's efforts thus far, urged action as soon as possible. Mexico understood and recognised this concern.

The Committee also expressed concern over some other populations of small cetaceans. It noted bycatch in fishing gear and other threats affecting harbour porpoise populations in European waters of the Belt Sea and the inner Baltic. It urged development of effective monitoring and mitigation measures. It was concerned over high bycatches in fishing gear of a population of franciscana in Brazil and endorsed a national recovery plan.

Longstanding concerns exist over the status of river dolphins. The Committee this year had additional concerns over intentional killing for bait in Brazil of two Amazon species, the botu and the tucuxi, in addition to other threats they face. It made a number of recommendations and Brazil and other range states indicated their willingness to act on these. The Committee was also pleased to hear of conservation efforts for the Indus River dolphins in Pakistan and the Mekong River population of Irrawaddy dolphins in Cambodia.



Finally, the Committee had expressed concern over the endangered Hector's dolphins and a sub-species of this, the Maui's dolphins. Bycatches in fishing gear were again a serious problem. New Zealand informed the Commission that it was extending the existing protected area in order to improve the situation.

This year, was the last year of the three-year term for the Chair of the IWC Scientific Committee, Dr Debi Palka. She will be succeeded by the Vice-Chair, Dr Toshihide Kitakado (Japan) and the new Vice-Chair, Dr Caterina Fortuna (Italy). The Commission thanked Dr Palka for her tremendous service and looked forward to working with new Chair and Vice-Chair.

Finally, the Commission returned to the resolution on cetacean and human health. This was adopted by consensus **(IWC/64/13rev2)**.

## PRESS RELEASE DAY 5

The Commission began the morning by discussing a draft resolution proposed by Monaco relating to co-operation with the UN which it hoped could be adopted by consensus ([IWC/64/11rev2](#)). After an exchange of views, consensus could not be reached. Monaco later indicated that it would work on the issue intersessionally.

The Commission then considered the Scientific Committee's workplan. After some discussion over the funding of a workshop to review the results of a completed special permit programme by Iceland, the Commission agreed to the workplan.

The Commission then discussed but did not agree to a proposal by Japan to form a working group to discuss matters related to small-type whaling ([IWC/64/17](#)).

The Commission was pleased to receive a donation of £11,000 from a number of NGOs towards the Voluntary Fund for Small Cetaceans Conservation Research.

The rest of the Commission's day was spent discussing a number of administrative matters. A proposal to amend the interest rates on unpaid contributions was defeated by 41 votes to 15. One of the most significant changes agreed was that the Commission would move to biennial meetings. However, the Scientific Committee will continue to meet annually. The next meeting of the Commission will therefore occur in 2014. The Commission also agreed to continue to work on proposals to assist developing countries participate in the Commission's work.

Finally the Commission elected a new Chair, Jeannine Compton-Antoine from St Lucia and a new Vice-Chair, Frederic Chemay from Belgium. Their terms will be for two years. Donna Petrachenko (Australia) agreed to continue to act as Chair of the Finance and Administration Committee. USA, Ghana, Panama and Japan were elected on to the newly established Bureau, along with the Chair and the Vice-Chair and Chair of the Finance and Administration Committee.

The 2013 meeting of the Scientific Committee will be held in the Republic of Korea. Venues for the 2014 meeting of the Scientific Committee and the 2014 Biennial Meeting of the Commission will be decided at a later date.

In conclusion, the meeting thanked Bruno Mainini for his excellent chairing of the meeting, Herman Oosthuizen for acting as interim chair and Tomás Guardia and the Government of Panama for their wonderful hosting of the meeting. The meeting closed at 1750.