

PRESS RELEASE - DAY 1 - 11 JULY 2011

Proceedings of the 63rd Annual Meeting of the International Whaling Commission, held in St Helier, began today (Monday 11th July) with a speech of welcome by Senator Alan Maclean, Economic Development Minister of the States of Jersey.

There is one new member to the Commission, Columbia, bringing the total to 89, of which 54 were present on the first day. The full list of member countries can be found [HERE](#). Due to new domestic duties and responsibilities, Ambassador Anthony Liverpool, Vice-Chair and Acting Chair of the Commission had announced his resignation to take effect on the opening day of the meeting. In these circumstances, the Commission was delighted that the Commissioner for South Africa, Herman Oosthuizen, had agreed to act as the Chair of the Meeting. Elections for Chair and Vice-Chair will take place on the final day of the meeting as is customary practice.

After the usual introductory items, including an overview of [available documents](#), the meeting adopted its Agenda.

The first major item of business was consideration of the **status of whale stocks**.

The Commission then received the [Report of the Scientific Committee](#) on the **status of whale stocks**. The Scientific Committee is conducting in-depth assessments of several populations and species. The objective is to determine the present status of populations compared to the past and estimate trends in abundance and possible causes of those trends, with the ultimate aim of identifying if there are anthropogenic threats to status that need to be addressed.

The first group covered was **Antarctic minke whales**. The Committee is finalising its work on abundance estimation. Although this work is not complete, it is clear that between the late 1980s and the turn of the century, there have been significant declines in the abundance estimates in three of the six management areas of the Antarctic. These include areas encompassing the Weddell and Ross Seas where ice conditions are complex and highly variable. The next step is to determine to what extent the estimated declines reflect changes in ice conditions affecting the surveys and to what extent they are real declines in abundance, and to identify the causes of any true declines.

There are seven breeding stocks of **humpback whales in the Southern Hemisphere**. Over the last three few years the Committee has been examining the breeding stock off West Africa. This was heavily reduced by whaling, reaching a low of less than 2,000 animals in the 1960s. The good news is that it is now recovering and now numbers almost 10,000 animals and has probably reached around half of its unexploited size. The Committee will next focus on the breeding stocks off eastern Australia and the central south Pacific. It was pleased this year to receive information that humpback whales off eastern Australia are increasing at around 11% annually.

The Committee completed a circumpolar assessment of **blue whales in the Southern Hemisphere** in 2008 (it is only about 1% of its unexploited size but thankfully is recovering at around 6.5% per annum). The Committee is now collecting information to try and assess blue whales on a regional basis. This year it received information on the small (<1,000) population off Isla da Chiloé. Special attention was paid again this year to the status of the endangered **western North Pacific gray whale**, whose feeding grounds coincide with major oil and gas operations off Sakhalin Island, Russian Federation. The population numbers only about 130 animals. The most interesting new information came from a satellite telemetry programme undertaken last summer under the auspices of the IWC where the single whale tagged (called 'Flex') was unexpectedly found to move across to the eastern Pacific. It is hoped the programme will put tags on up to 12 whales this summer.

Subsequently, additional evidence has been found that some of the animals that regularly feed off Sakhalin sometimes cross to the east. The Committee has strongly endorsed the [draft conservation plan](#) for western North Pacific gray whales and Commission members have agreed to work together to try to mitigate anthropogenic threats to this endangered population. 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. It also recommended that they share data to allow co-ordinated planning of activities, especially seismic surveys to minimise the impact on gray whales. 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.

With respect to **Southern Hemisphere right whales**, most of the Committee's work related to preparations for a major assessment workshop that will take place in Argentina in September. However, the Committee was pleased to receive information that the population surveyed along southern Australia has been increasing at around 7% per year since 1993 and now numbers around 3,500 animals.

Ship strikes and entanglements are a threat to the endangered **western North Atlantic right whale** population which numbers around 300-400 animals. Five deaths and four entanglement cases were reported off the US coast between November 2009 and October 2010. The Committee again expressed grave concern and recommended that anthropogenic mortality should be reduced to zero as soon as possible.

Finally under this item, the Committee reported on its new survey programme in the North Pacific – the **IWC-POWER programme (North Pacific Whale and Ecosystem Research)**. Final middle-long term planning is almost completed and results from the first cruise conducted in 2010 are being examined. The second cruise has just begun. The programme's objective is to obtain information on abundance and trends and to identify the causes of any trends should these be detected. It is particularly important since many of the populations in the central and eastern North Pacific there have not been assessed for decades. The primary tools will be sighting surveys, biopsy sampling and photo-identification. The Committee encouraged all member nations, especially those around the Pacific to participate. It is particularly grateful to the Government of Japan which has donated a research vessel and crew. The international team of scientists have thus far come from Japan, the USA and the Republic of Korea.

The Commission endorsed this part of the report of the Scientific Committee and its recommendations on whale stocks.

The Commission then received the [Report of its Working Group on Whale Killing Methods and associated Animal Welfare Issues](#). The Working Group received reports from five governments, four involved in whaling and one related to euthanasia of stranded animals. It also received reports from Norway with respect to the improvements it had made on killing methods. Using its new penthrite grenade, the mean time to death had decreased to 2 minutes with at least 80% of animals being killed instantly. The working group also heard details of the 2010 hunt for bowhead whales off Alaska and the improvements being made to its hunting equipment with technical co-operation from Norway. The Commission welcomed the reports by governments and the improvements documented.

There was considerable discussion of the report of a [non-IWC workshop sponsored by the UK](#) on the topic of welfare and ethics that had developed conclusions on a number of human-whale interactions including killing and euthanasia; use of whales in invasive research; whalewatching; and ship-strikes and entanglements. Although all governments recognised the importance of the issue, within the working group and the Commission itself there were both critical and supporting comments about the quality of the report. The UK had proposed terms of reference for an [intersessional working group](#) on this subject but there was no consensus within the Commission on its contents. The UK noted that it would continue its own work on this topic.

Last year the IWC held a very successful **IWC workshop on welfare issues associated with the entanglement of large whales**. This year, the Working Group and the Commission endorsed a proposal by Australia Norway and the USA to take forward recommendations from that workshop. The short-term initiatives include: convening a 2nd workshop; beginning capacity building in identified countries and regions; and establishing a standing group of experts to advise member countries upon request. The long-term initiatives include: assisting member countries to undertake research; promoting cooperative research; and identifying experts and sources of further information. An IWC voluntary fund will be established to assist with the cost of these actions. The details can be found in [Appendix 4 of the Working Group report](#).

The final Item considered on Day 1 related to work on the **Revised Management Scheme (RMS)**. Apart from the work of the Scientific Committee on the Revised Management Procedure, the Commission has not focused on this item for several years, rather directing its efforts to discussions on the **Future of the IWC**. In addition to some general matters relating to technical aspects of the

RMP, the Committee focussed on specific implementations and reviews. The purpose of these is to review all of the available information for a specific species/area combination, ensure that scientific uncertainty is fully taken into account through simulation trials, and, should the Commission request it, be able to determine safe catch limits. As there is a moratorium in place on commercial whaling, the Commission does not usually request that the final stage of calculating catch limits occurs, although it did request such information last year in the context of the Future of the IWC discussions. This year the Scientific Committee reported on progress with an Implementation Review of western North Pacific common minke whales. Given the technical complexity, the Committee informed the Commission that the review would now be completed in 2013, rather than the originally anticipated 2012. The Committee also reported on follow-up work related to the completed implementations of western North Pacific Bryde's whales, North Atlantic fin whales and North Atlantic common minke whales. In the Commission discussions, some countries criticised the current catching of fin whales by Iceland.

PRESS RELEASE - DAY 2 - 12 JULY 2011

The Commission agreed to a new experimental procedure relating to the participation of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in its Plenary sessions. At this meeting, the NGO total speaking time of up to 30 minutes will be split over three mutually agreed items; two NGOs, one from the sustainable use side and one from the conservation side will be allowed to speak on each item. The Commission will review its procedures with respect to NGO participation next year in the light of experience this year.

The first order of business concerned the question of safety at sea. The Commission has on several occasions (examples: [Resolution 2006-2](#) and [Resolution 2007-2](#)) strongly condemned dangerous activity in the Southern Ocean. This year, the Commission was disturbed to receive reports of an escalation of such behaviour. Progress on attempts to deal with this problem, which potentially can endanger human life, property and the ecosystem were discussed and the Agenda Item was left open to allow the possibility of developing a further resolution.

The next order of business related to the [report of the Finance and Administration Committee](#) which had a particularly busy agenda this year.

For a number of years, the Commission has been considering the merits of separating the meetings of the Scientific Committee and the Commission, to allow Commissioners more time to reflect upon that lengthy report and determine how best to act upon it. This year, the Commission endorsed this separation in principle, noting that some details remain to be worked upon. Upon a related matter, the Commission has also been discussing the move to biennial meetings of the Commission. It endorsed the [report of a working group on meeting frequency](#) whose task was to propose actions that would enable the Commission to move to biennial meetings after the 2012 Annual Meeting.

The Commission welcomed news that its website is being rebuilt to improve design and functionality both for the Commission and for the public. The new site will be completed before the next Annual Meeting.

There was considerable discussion of new and revised Rules of Procedure on a number of matters in the report of the Finance and Administration Committee. After some lengthy procedural discussions, it was agreed that further discussion of these will occur on the morning of Day 3, in the context of a draft Resolution on improving the effectiveness of operations within the IWC. Tomorrow, the Commission will also discuss issues arising from the difficulties some delegations experienced in obtaining visas in the context of the [Secretary's report](#).

PRESS RELEASE - DAY 3 – 13 JULY 2011

The Commission continued its extensive discussions of new and revised Rules of Procedure throughout the morning and early afternoon. After considerable work, the Committee agreed by consensus a [Resolution on improving the effectiveness of operations within the IWC](#) that also incorporated some changes to its Rules of Procedure and Financial Regulations. In addition to the rule changes, the active parts of the resolution included: investigating options for providing assistance to member governments with limited means to participate actively in the Commission's work; establishing a working group to further consider the role of observers at meetings of the Commission based on experience gained in that regard at IWC/63; agreeing to regularly review its rules in the light of international good practice and to address specific problems that may arise.

The Commission then agreed the remainder of issues under finance and administration including adopting a budget for 2011/12 with no increase in total expenditure.

The Committee then turned to the issue of [Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling \(ASW\)](#). This was discussed in light of the [report of the Commission's ASW Sub-Committee](#). The Commission received a summary of the Scientific Committee's work and then moved to consideration of strike limits. The Commission normally sets limits for aboriginal subsistence hunts on a five-year basis although in some cases there is a formal provision for annual review. Traditionally, the Scientific Committee reviews its advice each year and presents this to the Commission. This year, the Commission received this information and made no changes to the present limits:

Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Seas stock of bowhead whales (taken by native people of Alaska and Chukotka) - A total of up to 280 bowhead whales can be landed in the period 2008 - 2012, with no more than 67 whales struck in any year (and up to 15 unused strikes may be carried over each year).

Eastern North Pacific gray whales (taken by native people of Chukotka and Washington State) - A total catch of 620 whales is allowed for the years 2008 - 2012 with a maximum of 140 in any one year.

East Greenland common minke whales (taken by Greenlanders) - An annual strike limit of 12 whales is allowed for the years 2008 – 2012, with any unused quota available to be carried forward to subsequent years provided that no more than 3 strikes are added to the quota for any one year.

West Greenland bowhead whales (taken by Greenlanders) - An annual strike limit of 2 whales is allowed for the years 2008 - 2012 with an annual review by the Scientific Committee. Any unused quota can be carried forward to subsequent years so long as not more than 2 strikes are added to the quota for any one year.

West Greenland fin whales (taken by Greenlanders) - An annual strike limit of 16 whales is allowed for the years 2010 - 2012. However at the 2010 Meeting Denmark and Greenland agreed to voluntarily reduce further the catch limit for the West Greenland stock of fin whales from 16 to 10 for each of the years 2010, 2011 and 2012.

West Greenland common minke whales (taken by Greenlanders) - An annual strike limit of 178 whales is allowed for the years 2010 - 2012 with an annual review by the Scientific Committee. Any unused quota can be carried forwards so long as no more than 15 strikes are added to the quota for any one year.

West Greenland humpback whales (taken by Greenlanders) – An annual strike limit of 9 whales is allowed for the years 2010-2012 with an annual review by the Scientific Committee. Any unused quota can be carried forwards so long as not more than 2 strikes are added to the quota for any one year.

Humpback whales taken by St Vincent and The Grenadines - For the seasons 2008-2012 the number of humpback whales to be taken shall not exceed 20.

Next year, new block limits will need to be decided. The Commission has agreed to establish a [small working group to identify and consider any unresolved ASW issues](#) with a view to suggesting short- and longer-term ways forward on these next year.

The Commission then moved onto consideration of socio-economic implications and small-type whaling. Japan to its longtime concern over the hardship suffered by its four community-based whaling communities since the implementation of the commercial whaling moratorium. It noted that in previous years, it had requested a vote on its proposal for an interim relief catch allocation to relieve

this hardship. It noted that in a spirit of co-operation it had not requested a vote during the discussions the future of the IWC process. Although it was disappointed at the outcome of those discussions last year, it recognised the improved atmosphere of discussions that process had engendered. Appreciative of the efforts for consensus that had already occurred in discussions, it again would refrain from asking for a vote this year.

The Commission then turned to the issue of the [Future of the IWC](#). Last year, it had decided to take a pause in those discussions. This year, the Commission agreed to: encourage continued dialogue amongst its members on the future of the IWC; co-ordinate proposals or initiatives as widely as possible prior to submission; continue to co-operate in taking forward the Commission's work, notwithstanding some fundamental differences in views.

Finally, the Commission returned to the question of obtaining visas it began on Day 2. It received an updated version of the [Secretary's report of this issue](#) and a constructive discussion was held on how to avoid such problems in the future.

PRESS RELEASE - DAY 4 – 14 JULY 2011

The meeting opened with continued discussion of the **safety at sea** issue that began on Day 3. [The Commission agreed by consensus a Resolution](#). The Resolution inter alia reiterated that the Commission condemns any actions that are a risk to human life and property and that this is not the way to pursue the resolution of different view regarding whales and whaling. It also recognises the importance of the International Maritime Organisation with respect to safety at sea; and encourages all governments to fulfil their obligations under IMO and UNCLOS.

The Commission then moved to a discussion of Sanctuaries. The primary issue was a proposal sponsored by Brazil and Argentina for the [creation of a South Atlantic Sanctuary](#). This has been a particularly contentious item within the Commission for several years. To establish a Sanctuary requires an amendment to the Schedule to the Convention and requires a three-quarters majority of those voting 'yes' or 'no'. It became clear during discussions that consensus on the sanctuary was not possible. After a proposal to take this to vote and the subsequent withdrawal of a number pro-sustainable use member governments from the room, the Chair called a Private Commissioners' meeting, inter alia to try to resolve a serious procedural issue with respect to a quorum.

The [outcome of those discussions can be found here](#). The agenda item has been left open until the 2012 Annual Meeting. While recognising the diversity of views on this issue, the Commission recognises the importance of a South Atlantic Sanctuary to many member governments. The Commission has resolved to continue to discuss the item as the first substantive agenda item at IWC64. If consensus cannot be reached then a decision will be taken in accord with the Commission's Rules of procedure.

Given the time taken to conclude the above item, the Commission was left with very limited time to review its remaining sub-group reports including those of the [Conservation Committee](#), [Infractions Sub-Committee](#) and those items of the [Scientific Committee not yet discussed](#). It endorsed those reports but agreed deferred full discussion of them until next year. The election of a Chair and Vice-Chair of the Commission will be undertaken by postal ballot.

The Commission was pleased to accept an invitation by the Government of Panama to host the 64th meeting of the Commission in Panama City from 11 June to 6 July 2012.

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

Scientific Committee (Norway)

Day	Date	Morning	Afternoon
1	Fri 27 May		
2	Sat 28 May	Set-up (and pre-meetings of the Scientific Committee on 28 and 29 May*)	
3	Sun 29 May		
4	Mon 30 May	Introductory Plenary**	Reading
5	Tues 31 May	Sub-committee introductions	Reading
6	Weds 1 June		
7	Thur 2 June		
8	Fri 3 June		
9	Sat 4 June	Sub-committee meetings	
10	Sun 5 June		
11	Mon 6 June		
12	Tues 7 June		
13	Weds 8 June	Rest day	
14	Thur 9 June		
15	Fri 10 June	Scientific Committee Plenary	
16	Sat 11 June		
17	Sun 12 June	Scientific Committee Convenors Meeting	

Commission and sub-groups (Jersey)

Day	Date	Morning	Afternoon
1	Sun 3 July		Set-up
2	Mon 4 July		Registration (delegates, observers)
3	Tues 5 July	INF	WKM BSC
4	Weds 6 July	CC	ASW
5	Thur 7 July		F&A
6	Fri 8 July		Report preparation and review
7	Sat 9 July		Document translation and Plenary set-up
8	Sun 10 July		Registration (delegates, observers and media) & Private Commissioner's Meeting
9	Mon 11 July		
10	Tues 12 July		63rd Annual Commission Meeting
11	Weds 13 July		
12	Thur 14 July		
13	Fri 15 July		Equipment dismantle (no meetings)

*Possible pre-meetings include: AWMP gray whale *Implementation Review*; Western North Pacific common minke whale *Implementation Review*; Assessment of humpback whale Breeding Stock B
 **Including welcome address from Norway

Key:

CC	Conservation Committee
INF	Infractions Sub-committee
WKM	Working Group on Whale Killing Methods and Associated Welfare Issues
ASW	Aboriginal Whaling Sub-committee
BSC	Budgetary Sub-committee (not open to GO/IGO/NGO observers)
F&A	Finance and Administration Committee (not open to GO/IGO/NGO observers)