

**64<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION  
(IWC): PANAMA, 2 - 6 JULY 2012**

**UK COMMISSIONER'S REPORT**

**Summary**

- Overall the UK objectives for this meeting were met, delivering positive results for the conservation of whales. The UK made significant progress strengthening the IWC's welfare agenda, gaining consensus towards embedding welfare considerations across the work of the IWC.
- Recommendations from a UK Chaired group on IWC financing were adopted. This represents a positive step towards ensuring conservation projects gain adequate funding.
- The UK maintained our strong line on a number of key issues, raising our concern about the critically endangered status of Western Gray Whales and our support for a conservation management plan to protect Southern Right Whales. The UK was pleased to take on the role of Vice-Chair of the IWC's Conservation Committee.
- The UK helped to strengthen the growing focus of the Scientific Committee on environmental threats. For example, welcoming further international work on marine debris and ship strikes.
- An EU resolution on the importance of reducing contaminants into the marine environment and the possible effects on human health from contaminated whale meat consumption was passed by consensus. The UK also supported the South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary, proposed by Brazil and others, which looked to promote the long-term conservation of large whales throughout their habitat. Unfortunately this proposal was defeated.
- The UK continued to support Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling where it is sustainable and there is a clear and identified 'need'. We voted in favour of a request from the USA, Russian Federation and St. Vincent and the Grenadines for a roll-over of their existing quota for the next six year period, receiving assurances from St. Vincent and the Grenadines on the better provision of data. Denmark's request, on behalf of Greenland, for an increased quota was rejected as many countries continued to have concerns over the level of commerciality associated with the hunts and whether the increase was appropriate to meet their needs; as a result no quota was agreed for Greenland.
- An agreement to increase the participation of observers and NGOs in the work of the IWC and improvements to the effectiveness of the organisation will continue to be developed, in line with international best practice.

- The Commission and its sub-committees will now meet every other year instead of annually. The Scientific Committee will continue to meet each year, South Korea offering to host the next meeting in 2013.

## **IWC64**

1. Of the 89 contracting members to the IWC, 69 were in attendance. Bruno Mainini of Switzerland agreed to Chair IWC64.
2. Richard Benyon, Defra Minister for Natural Environment and Fisheries attended part of the meeting, demonstrating the UK's commitment to the IWC and whaling issues. Australia was also represented at Ministerial level.
3. For the first time in many years the IWC held votes on several proposals. We see this voting process as part of the healthy and democratic functioning of this organisation.

## **Sanctuaries**

4. A proposal for a South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary was tabled for the eleventh consecutive year by Argentina and Brazil. Following interventions from pro-whaling nations, arguing that there is no scientific basis for the sanctuary, it was pushed to a vote, failing to gain the  $\frac{3}{4}$  majority needed for adoption.
5. The UK believes that sanctuaries are an important component in a range of measures for the conservation of whales, affording them greater protection in highly important areas for breeding and feeding. The UK remains in favour of the proposed South Atlantic Ocean Sanctuary and urges countries to respect existing sanctuaries which should be no hunting zones.

## **Animal welfare issues**

6. Welfare remains a key element in the UK's opposition to whaling. We were pleased to host a workshop on Animal Welfare and Ethics in March 2012 to look at the history of animal welfare issues in the IWC and developments in other international fora in dealing with animal welfare issues and submit a series of recommendations to IWC64.
7. IWC members agreed by consensus to the recommendations put forward and established a working group to:
  - a. review its Terms of Reference and existing Action Plan to see if they need updating or revision and make recommendations accordingly;
  - b. identify and agree upon important issues or themes to progress the promotion of good animal welfare and agree a timetable of regular future technical workshops on these issues that would report back to

the relevant working groups, recognising the success of previous IWC workshops on specific issues with invited external experts.

8. The development of plans for an expert workshop on the euthanasia of large whales (both stranded animals and those entangled whales for which euthanasia appears to be the only option) was also agreed. The UK offered to provide funding for this workshop.

### **Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling (ASW)**

9. The USA presented a joint proposal for the renewal of aboriginal quotas on behalf of their subsistence hunters, Russia's Chukotka and St Vincent and the Grenadines. A number of countries (including the UK) raised concern about this grouping, which prevented proposals being judged on their own merits, and also on the commercialised nature of the St Vincent and Grenadines hunt and its poor provision of data. Following a vote, the package of quotas was adopted by 48 votes to 10.
10. A request from Denmark on behalf of Greenland for an increased quota proved more contentious. The Scientific Committee repeated its concern about the lack of adequate data submitted by Greenland on its hunts but agreed that the proposed catches were likely to be sustainable. However, a number of countries challenged the 'need' aspect of the request; some in light of investigations which have revealed that whale meat is being served to tourists in Greenlandic restaurants and is available in supermarkets.
11. EU Member States spent a significant amount of time encouraging Denmark to revise its request, in the knowledge that asking for an increase would not gain consensus. Denmark called for a vote on the request as it stood which was subsequently rejected and no quota awarded. Rather than amend its request Denmark stated that it and Greenland would reflect on its next steps.

### **Strengthening IWC financing**

12. A UK led group on strengthening IWC financing submitted a series of eleven recommendations to this year's meeting which were adopted by consensus. In essence the recommendations will increase funding of whale conservation projects and move the Commission towards establishing a dedicated conservation fund.

### **Scientific Whaling**

13. In its opening statement the Republic of Korea stated its intention to undertake so called 'scientific whaling' along their coast on an endangered population of Minke Whale, following in the footsteps of Japan's existing and much criticised 'scientific whaling' programme. The announcement caused a huge outcry from pro-conservation IWC countries and has received significant

press coverage. Many countries, including the UK, have and will continue to urge the Government of the Republic of Korea to reconsider.

### **Small Cetaceans**

14. The Scientific Committee made a number of recommendations to progress on the conservation of Small Cetaceans.
15. Continued concern was raised about the lack of assessment of the stocks of killer whales which are exploited in Greenland. The Scientific Committee also expressed particular concern about the low abundance of Maui's dolphins in New Zealand and concluded that additional measures may be required to ensure recovery of the species.
16. The focus this year was a review of the status of ziphiid whales in the North Pacific and Northern Indian Ocean (ten species of beaked whales). Recommendations included that improved understanding of population structure, distribution, abundance estimates and movement of the stocks off Japan are required for Baird's beaked whale, particularly as long as hunting continues there; and that a photo-ID study of Baird's beaked whales conducted from the Commander Islands in the western Bering Sea provided the first evidence of a social structure for this species ('a fission-fusion society') and was encouraged to continue.
17. Important common issues coming from this review related to ziphiids risk of entanglement in fishing nets, effects of anthropogenic noise and marine debris. The Scientific Committee recommended the continuation and expansion of studies to better understand and estimate the impact of anthropogenic actions on ziphiids and in particular that military exercises and seismic surveys should avoid areas of important habitat for beaked whales and that further effort should be made to mitigate their impact.

### **Conservation Committee**

18. The UK submitted its national cetacean conservation report (IWC/64/CC8) highlighting progress made since IWC63. We welcomed the whole day allocated to the meeting this year allowing full discussion of the conservation agenda and the growing relationship between the Scientific and Conservation Committees, stating that continued collaboration between these two bodies would ensure that conservation measures benefit from sound science with the aim of improving the health of whale populations.
19. In support of our commitment to the work of the conservation committee the UK offered to take up role of Vice-Chair at its next meeting. The UK emphasised it will continue to be a key advocate of conservation issues and work towards making the IWC an organisation to provide for the long-term protection of whales.

20. In relation to those issues reviewed by the Conservation Committee and then endorsed by all IWC members, a five-year strategic plan for whale watching was adopted.
21. The Western North Pacific gray whales (estimated at 130 animals in their breeding ground) remain critically endangered. The UK once again expressed its concern at the status of this species, whose feeding grounds coincide with oil and gas operations off Sakhalin Island, Russian Federation, and welcomed the Scientific Committee's recommendation that appropriate monitoring and mitigation plans be implemented for oil and gas activities.
22. Progress on the three existing Conservation Management Plans (CMPs) was noted (the Arabian Sea humpback whales, Southern right whales and Western North Pacific gray whales). New CMPs for the Southwest Atlantic Southern right whale and for the Southeast Pacific right whale were also agreed.
23. Marine Debris: A Scientific Committee proposal for a workshop to consider the interactions between cetaceans and marine debris was well received in the Conservation Committee where it was decided that this could be a joint initiative between the two committees.
24. Marine Renewable Energy Developments: The Scientific Committee presented a report and recommendations of a workshop on Marine Renewable Energy Developments, which was endorsed by the SC and the IWC. Recommendations included: the development of a strategy to minimise risk; fundamental research, including into population structure, status, distribution and procedures for assessing impacts; measures for management and monitoring; evaluation of threats; and data sharing. The SC also agreed that there is an urgent need to develop or improve effective noise mitigation measures or quieter foundation installation methods.
25. Entanglement and Ship Strikes: The IWC endorsed two workshops on disentanglement, one in the French West Indies (e.g. Martinique, Guadeloupe) and the other likely to be held in Mexico.
26. It also endorsed future work on disentanglement of whales, to encompass the following activities: establish a dynamic entanglement response section on the IWC website; consider establishing an international entanglement database; facilitate data exchange; promote establishment of national entanglement response networks; provide advice to member governments; develop a proposal for an international workshop on entanglement prevention; and continue to promote an IWC-managed fund for the entanglement response.
27. Funding for a dedicated ship-strikes coordinator was also advocated and a strategic plan for ship-strikes work will also now be developed.

### **Contamination and human health**

28. An EU/Switzerland co-sponsored resolution on the importance of continued scientific research with regard to the impact of the degradation of the marine environment on the health of cetaceans and related human health effects was adopted by consensus.

### **Move to biennial meetings and the establishment of the Bureau**

29. The Commission and its sub-committees will now meet every other year instead of annually. The Scientific Committee will continue to meet each year and South Korea has offered to host the next meeting in 2013. The Commission established a Bureau to advise the Chair of the Commission and the Secretariat especially at times when the Commission is not in session. The bureau will comprise the Chair and Vice-Chair, USA, Panama, Ghana, Japan and the Chair of the Finance and Administration Committee. The UK will ensure that the valuable work on whale conservation maintains its momentum by pushing for more intersessional work on key issues. Moving to biennial meetings will also bring a small financial saving for countries.
30. Also elected this year were a new Chair and Vice Chair for the Commission: Jeannine Compton-Antoine (from St Lucia) and Frederic Chemay (from Belgium) respectively.

### **Other matters**

31. A Draft Resolution on 'Highly migratory cetaceans in the high seas': presented by Monaco, calling on the United Nations General Assembly to help manage unregulated catches affecting all cetaceans failed to gain consensus. Following considerable discussion and revisions to the original draft Monaco withdrew the resolution and announced work would be progressed interessionally, including via an informal (non IWC) working group.

### **The role of the EU at IWC63**

32. The EU mandate on whaling currently states that the IWC must “ensure an effective international regulatory framework for the conservation and management of whales guaranteeing a significant improvement in the conservation status of whales in the long term and bringing all whaling operations under IWC control”.
33. The UK delegation worked hard with the Cypriot Presidency, the EU Commission and other EU Members States to establish a common position on many proposals and ensure that the IWC moratorium on commercial whaling was not undermined.

### **Scientific Committee**

34. In the Scientific Committee meeting in Panama, the UK team helped with evaluations of the status of various cetacean populations and the ongoing

work on environmental threats, including this year relating to the ongoing takes of orcas by Greenland and the situation of the Western North Pacific gray whales (see 21 above).

35. The opinions of the Scientific Committee help underpin the expanding conservation work of the IWC. UK scientists are instrumental in this, including, for example, leading the work on marine debris and making significant contributions to the ongoing work on whale watching, 'marine bush meat' and climate change.

Nigel Gooding  
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