

**WWF OPENING STATEMENT
60TH MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION
SANTIAGO, CHILE, JUNE 2008**

“The United Nations once dealt only with Governments. By now we know that peace and prosperity cannot be achieved without partnerships involving Governments, international organizations, the business community and civil society. In today’s world, we depend on each other.” Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General

WWF appreciates this opportunity to attend the 60th meeting of the International Whaling Commission, and thanks the government of Chile for hosting the meeting, and the people of Santiago for their hospitality. We wish the Contracting Governments and observers a stimulating and productive meeting based on mutual understanding and a strong commitment to cetacean conservation.

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 recovered, and the governments of the world have brought whaling under international control with a precautionary and conservation-based enforceable management and compliance system adhered to by all whaling nations. (Please refer to the “*WWF Position Statement*”.)

THE IWC’S ROLE IN CETACEAN CONSERVATION

WWF supports the inclusion of conservation items on the agenda of the IWC and the ongoing work of the Conservation Committee as essential. WWF urges the IWC to take action rapidly to address significant threats facing cetaceans globally, such as climate change, bycatch, ship strikes, oil and gas exploration and development, 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 due to human activities. We call your attention to a new paper on this topic, commissioned by WWF and submitted to the IWC Scientific Committee. Our summary of that report, *Ice breaker: Pushing the boundaries for whales*, is available during the meeting and at www.panda.org/species/iwc in English, French, and Spanish. The new modeling exercise shows that levels of global warming predicted over the next 40 years will lead to declines by up to 30% in winter sea-ice coverage of the Southern Ocean in some key areas, likely leading to a reduction in krill – the primary food source for Antarctica’s great whales. In addition, poleward movement of frontal zones – key foraging areas for whales – mean that migratory whales such as the blue whale and humpback whale may need to travel 200-500 kilometres further south - increasing their already long migrations, and reducing the duration of the feeding season. One of the species that will be most affected by climate warming is the Antarctic minke whale, currently taken in large numbers in Japan’s ‘scientific whaling’ programme. We are pleased that climate change is firmly on the IWC agenda, and that the Scientific Committee’s proposal from IWC59 is being carried forward and a special workshop will consider this issue. We call upon governments to commit technical and financial resources to assist the Committee to address this issue, initially through support to this workshop.

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. In particular, swift and cooperative international action is needed to reduce bycatch of certain critically endangered cetacean populations.

ABORIGINAL SUBSISTENCE WHALING

WWF urges governments to resist any efforts to accept a definition or interpretation of aboriginal subsistence whaling that includes whaling that is commercial in nature, such as Japan’s so-called “small type coastal

whaling”. To do so would be to dilute the rights of legitimate aboriginal communities, with demonstrable subsistence needs, as well as jeopardize the fundamental basis of the commercial whaling moratorium.

Furthermore, when considering the aboriginal subsistence whaling quotas for Greenland, we are very concerned with recent reports revealing the commercial nature of a proportion of the whale hunt in Greenland. We are also concerned with the methodologies used to determine the subsistence needs from whale meat in Greenland. WWF supports legitimate aboriginal subsistence whaling, but urges the Commission to ensure that the above issues are resolved by Greenland before the additional quota request for humpbacks is granted.

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. At that time, killing whales was the only way to obtain some of the most basic biological information, which was then used to set catch quotas. Today, modern scientific non-lethal techniques provide the data required for whale management more efficiently and accurately than lethal sampling. 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, to bring its research efforts into the 21st Century through the use of existing non-lethal techniques, and to refrain from using science as an excuse to bring whale meat into its commercial markets. 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. WWF therefore fully supports the proposal of Australia relating to the need for regional non-lethal research partnerships (IWC/60/16), and urges contracting governments to support and further develop these initiatives.

SANCTUARY FOR WHALES

WWF urges the Contracting Governments of the IWC to respect the wishes of range states and support the establishment of additional IWC sanctuaries for whales. We strongly support the efforts of range countries to establish a sanctuary in the South Atlantic, a region in which whale-watching has been steadily increasing, providing ecotourism income, benefits for local communities, and research opportunities. If it is decided, in light of ongoing negotiations, not to put the sanctuary proposal to a vote at this meeting, we urge governments nevertheless to state their strong support for this sanctuary, recognizing the excellent efforts of Brazil, Argentina, South Africa, and other countries to provide economic and development benefits to local communities through whale-watching ecotourism. WWF also urges the IWC to act to stop scientific whaling in whale sanctuaries. Sanctuaries were established to allow scientists to study whales in the absence of directed takes. Japan’s continued abuse of the scientific whaling provisions of the ICRW, by whaling in the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary, is not acceptable.

WHALES and FISHERIES

The argument that great whales are behind declining fish stocks is completely without scientific foundation. It is not the whales, but rather over-fishing and excess fishing capacity that are responsible for diminishing supplies of fish in developing countries. WWF believes that blaming whales serves only to benefit wealthy whaling nations while harming developing nations by distracting any debate on the real causes of the declines of their fisheries. We call your attention to three new reports on this issue—from the Lenfest Ocean Programme, Humane Society International (research by Dr Daniel Pauly), and WWF. WWF’s work reviews the scientific literature originating from Japan and Norway—the two countries most strongly promoting the idea that whales pose problems for fisheries. The review concluded that where good data are available, there is no evidence to support the contention that whale predation presents an ecological issue for fisheries. WWF urges contracting governments to counter any unfounded claims that food security is threatened by whales.

WWF urges delegates to focus on the internationally understood definition of Ecosystem Based Management—a holistic approach focused on the conservation of habitats and ecosystem integrity, with the objective of maintaining ecosystem health, resilience and functioning (including the importance of predator diversity such as whales and other cetaceans). This internationally-agreed and accepted definition of ecosystem based management involves the management of fisheries to avoid harm to the ecosystem, rather than the manipulation of marine mammal populations, and therefore does not *de facto* involve culling of single species groups such as whales, as is implied by some. In addition, true Ecosystem Based Management involves the consideration of all impacts to the ecosystem, including environmental threats such as climate

change, ship strikes, habitat loss and degradation. WWF urges all IWC member states to ensure they are in line with international norms by using the term Ecosystem Based Management in its internationally understood context during discussions of the IWC, and rejecting all claims that Ecosystem Based Management *de facto* refers to culling of whale populations.

WHALE MEAT TRADE

WWF strongly supports effective enforcement and implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), including the effective implementation of the CITES Appendix I listings of great whales. We are very concerned by the recent export of a shipment of whale meat from Norway and Iceland to Japan. Although this shipment is technically legal under CITES, since Norway, Iceland and Japan all have reservations to the Appendix I CITES listings in question, the shipment nevertheless undermines the effectiveness of both CITES and the IWC. The CITES Parties have clearly stated that reservations undermine the effectiveness of CITES. We recommend that this commercial shipment not be cleared by Japanese Customs officials. Furthermore, we believe that the collaborative, consensus spirit of discussion that the IWC is trying to foster is undermined by this trade. We cannot see how negotiations of the “Future of the IWC” can proceed unless these reservations are removed.

FUTURE OF THE IWC

WWF supports the efforts of the contracting governments of the ICRW to reform the IWC, and to build a future that provides greater benefits for whale conservation. WWF believes there are fundamental issues that must be addressed if this effort is to be successful. WWF believes that governments must address procedural issues, as they are doing, but must also address the substantive issues that are critical to the conservation of all cetaceans, as well as to the legitimacy of the IWC as an international agreement.

WWF recognizes that the ICRW is currently the only international instrument available to formally address all cetaceans and all threats to their continued existence, although other instruments are important for aspects of cetacean conservation. WWF values the important contributions of the IWC Scientific Committee on this broader range of conservation issues and species, and urges the IWC to expand its work to formally address directed take of small cetaceans, climate change, pollution, gear entanglement and bycatch, and ship strikes. For the IWC to remain relevant over the long term it must expand its scope to address all human activities which threaten cetaceans. WWF welcomes the discussion during this meeting on the need to improve the scientific underpinning of IWC decision-making, and encourages governments to ensure that the work of the IWC Scientific Committee is fully incorporated into decisions made by the Commission, and that governments fully consider the input from the scientific community.

We support efforts that are underway to improve the effectiveness of the IWC's operations through, for example, improvements to the rules of procedure, improvements in information management and greater transparency among Contracting Governments, observer NGOs, and the Secretariat.

Civil society—the imperative: The IWC must fully enable civil society engagement with discussions on the future of the IWC. WWF welcomes the efforts that have been taken to date by governments to address some of these issues by engaging in frank discussions with civil society on the future of the IWC. However, the rules of the IWC are not in line with modern multilateral agreements, or the United Nations, and preclude NGOs from speaking publicly. WWF is also deeply disturbed at the suggestion that civil society should be specifically excluded from a working group on the future of the IWC. If this body is to be successful, it is imperative that civil society is engaged, and that NGOs are provided with opportunities to provide insight and expertise into the full process.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The IWC is at a crossroads—the world is watching, and the integrity of the IWC is in the balance. WWF stands ready to work with governments to find the best possible solutions for the conservation of whales and other cetaceans. In that spirit, WWF strongly urges governments to fully integrate input from civil society (NGOs) into their deliberations on the future of the IWC—for it is the people of the world and citizens of all 80 member states that will stand in judgment of the decisions and compromises reached. The WWF team at IWC60 (from WWF International, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Argentina, and Senegal) look forward to dialogue here in Chile, and the entire WWF Network in more than 100 countries stands ready to work with governments in the months ahead.