



WHALES, WHALING & THE INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION

WWF POSITION ON WHALING AND THE IWC

- WWF's goal is to ensure that viable populations of all cetacean species occupy their historical range, and fulfil their role in maintaining the integrity of ocean ecosystems. We work at a local level and across a broad range of international fora to address and reduce threats to cetaceans. In doing so, WWF acknowledges the widely varied cultural attitudes toward the conservation and management of whales. WWF opposes commercial whaling, now and until WWF is convinced that 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 the whaling nations.
- In the more than 60 years since the International Convention on the Regulation of Whaling (which established the International Whaling Commission) was adopted, it has become impossible to separate the threats presented by commercial whaling from those of marine and noise pollution, commercial bycatch, overfishing, ship strikes, oil and gas development or climate change. It would be far preferable, and of greater potential conservation benefit to cetaceans, for the IWC to now embrace the internationally accepted principles of Ecosystem Based Management, and address all of the threats to cetacean populations in a broad, multilateral context. As such, WWF urges governments to make the IWC an effective international forum for the conservation of all cetaceans, particularly those that are endangered, and to work to minimise adverse human impacts from all human-caused threats. Achieving successes together to alleviate these threats will increase the trust between member governments, which has been lost over recent decades.
- The IWC has an important contribution to make to the conservation of all cetaceans, but the current stalemate caused by the Contracting Governments' differing views on commercial whaling is adding to the many threats faced by both the great whales and small cetaceans. WWF supports a resolution to the current stalemate in the IWC, and looks forward to working cooperatively with all governments and stakeholders with an interest in whales and whaling to find a common way forward to ensure a secure and sustainable future for the world's whales.
- In particular, WWF continues to call 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, above all in the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary.
- WWF continues to oppose the resumption in international trade in whale parts and products, and supports the retention on CITES Appendix I of all whale species and stocks protected from commercial whaling by the IWC.
- WWF recognises the human need for aboriginal subsistence whaling where it is carried out by aboriginal, indigenous, or native peoples with long-standing, strong social or cultural ties to whaling; where products are for local consumption only; and with a precautionary management scheme in place to ensure such activities are sustainable and do not threaten whale populations.



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INTRODUCTION

Humanity's complex relationship with whales and dolphins is marked by contradiction, ranging from reverence, affinity, and cultural significance to one of history's darkest chapters in the unsustainable exploitation of any wild species. Few animals on land or sea inspire such awe as whales, yet relatively few have suffered so severely at human hands. WWF's efforts to end uncontrolled commercial whaling is part of a much broader effort to minimise human impacts on all cetaceans, whether from commercial exploitation, marine pollution, climate change, ship strikes, fisheries by-catch, or other human-caused threats. In the context of the International Whaling Commission, WWF is working to promote conservation of all cetaceans as well as to ensure that commercial exploitation never again threatens any species of whale.

STATUS OF AND THREATS TO WHALES

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, such as the Western North Atlantic right whale survive as a few hundred individuals at the brink of extinction, having failed to rebound from past exploitation. Others are believed to be recovering to healthier levels, although whale population estimates nearly always have a very large margin of uncertainty. While whaling remains a concern, other threats may ultimately exact a greater toll on whales. Bycatch in fishing operations is the most pressing threat to cetaceans worldwide. Scientists studying the impacts of bycatch on cetaceans now estimate that over 300,000 whales, dolphins and porpoises die each year in gillnets and other types of fishing gear.

Accumulation of DDT, PCBs, and other toxic contaminants in the marine food chain is already affecting some whales and dolphins and may endanger their immune systems and ability to reproduce. The impacts of global over-fishing on the food supplies of many whale and dolphin species are unknown. Rapid climate change in the next few decades is expected to disrupt whale distribution, migration patterns, and breeding, and we cannot yet accurately predict how severely this will impact populations.

Such broad-based threats to the marine environment are difficult to address in ways that will alleviate harm to whales specifically, and make it all the more important that whales are not also threatened by uncontrolled commercial whaling.

WWF strongly support the efforts of contracting governments, the IWC Scientific Committee, and the Conservation Committee, in finding science-based solutions to these problems. This year WWF and its associates have submitted scientific studies relating to bycatch, ship strikes and climate change to the IWC Scientific Committee to assist with the development of these crucial programmes of work.



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‘WHALES EAT FISH’ AND THE IWC

A number of contracting governments to the IWC have claimed that whales need to be culled (through whaling) as the large number of whales in the oceans is causing a depletion of the fisheries resources available for human consumption. However the science behind this issue strongly suggests that there is no evidence that whales compete with fish stocks targeted by humans. Analyses indicate that most food consumed by marine mammals consists of prey types that fisheries do not target, and that marine mammals consume most of their food in areas where humans do not fish.

WWF would like to draw your attention to new research released by the Pew Foundation and WWF at this meeting which provides for the first time a detailed analysis of the issue at a regional level – in West Africa, the South Pacific and the Caribbean - as well as an overall review of scientific research on the subject. These documents together demonstrate that no scientific evidence currently exists that the culling of marine mammals will aid in the recovery of commercial fisheries, and that in some cases culling of marine mammals could actually be detrimental to fishing interests. The best solution to the problem of declining fisheries is to rebuild overexploited stocks and ecosystems through relieving fishing pressure, improving gear selectivity and fishing exploitation patterns, protecting habitat and making a wise and generous use of protected areas and no-take zones.

WHALING AND THE IWC

The International Whaling Commission (IWC) was established under the 1946 International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW), and is the sole international regulatory body charged with the management of cetaceans. The need for international co-operation for the conservation, management and study of cetaceans was recognised by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (Articles 65 and 120), and reaffirmed by Agenda 21 (Chapter 17) as essential for these highly migratory species.

Despite the global moratorium on commercial whaling put in place by the IWC in 1986, whales are still being caught commercially. More than 30,000 whales of five different species have been killed during the moratorium. Japan continues to catch hundreds of whales annually (many in the Southern Ocean, designated by the member states as an IWC whale sanctuary), exploiting a loophole for ‘scientific research’, and sells the meat commercially in Japan. Iceland, after rejoining the IWC in 2002, immediately began its own “scientific whaling” programme, and in 2006 resumed commercial whaling. In the 2006/7 season, Iceland took a total of 8 whales under commercial whaling, in addition to the 60 minke whales that were taken under the guise of “scientific research”. Norway conducts a commercial hunt under a legal “objection” to the moratorium.

The actions of these nations undermine the spirit and intent of the moratorium, and proceed without IWC approval and in the face of repeated censure by the Commission. In 2002, 2004, and 2007, Japan tried to re-open international commercial trade in whale products by submitting a proposal to the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The proposals were soundly rejected.



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Of particular concern is Japan's so called "scientific" whaling programme which has been increasing both in numbers taken and species hunted since the moratorium was implemented. Japan took a total of 866 whales in the 2006/07 season, and this year, the full JARPA II programme commenced, meaning that the current permit (2007/08) is for 850±10% Antarctic minke whales, 50 fin whales and 50 humpback whales (although Japan subsequently agreed to delay the take of humpback whales under this programme until at least until after the June 2008 Annual Meeting.) Japan also runs a 'research programme' in the North Pacific, which took a total of 355 whales of four different species in 2007/8, including 101 sei whales – an endangered species.

FUTURE OF THE IWC

The IWC's mandate requires first and foremost that it **prevent the return of uncontrolled large-scale commercial whaling**. This is the near-term agenda by which it will be judged and is currently the main contribution it has to offer conservation of cetaceans more broadly. However, the 1946 ICRW was negotiated at a time before the broad range of threats to cetaceans were understood, and indeed before some of today's threats were recognised to exist (e.g., toxic waste disposal, climate change, ship strikes, and gear entanglement). Furthermore, the ICRW predates the developed of ecosystem based approaches, which are now the internationally accepted norm and necessitate a holistic approach to management that ensures all aspects of biodiversity and biological processes are conserved. The IWC must bring itself in line with other multilateral environmental institutions by making the fundamental shift from the single species approach to a broader, more holistic approach by adopting the principles of Ecosystem Based Management.

WWF recognises that the ICRW is currently the only international instrument available to formally **address all cetaceans and all threats** to their continued existence. WWF also 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 by-catch, ship strikes, and the impacts of over-fishing on cetacean food resources. For the IWC to remain relevant over the long term it must expand its scope to address the other human activities which threaten cetaceans and focus action on ensuring the survival of the most threatened species.

In addition, there is a need to **improve the effectiveness of the IWC's operations** through, for example, improvements to the rules of procedure; improvements in information management and dissemination; improvements in communications with nations who are not Contracting Governments; greater transparency and closer working relationships among Contracting Governments, observer NGOs, and the Secretariat. Consistent with standard practice in other intergovernmental fora, there is also a need to provide non-governmental organisations, as representatives of civil society worldwide, real opportunities to contribute to the work and mission of the IWC, and to participate actively in the work of the IWC and its committees.

WWF welcomes and supports the efforts that have been taken to date by governments to address some of these issues by engaging in frank discussions about on the future of the IWC. 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



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other cetaceans. WWF supports a resolution to the current stalemate, and stands ready to work with all governments to find a solution.

In that spirit, WWF attended the Intersessional meeting of the IWC, from 6-8 March in London, and the Pew whale symposium from 30-31 January in Tokyo. The Intersessional meeting was convened to discuss ways forward in the IWC, to reduce polarization and move forward on issues of whale conservation and whaling. Although the rules of the IWC are not in line with modern multilateral agreements, and preclude NGOs from speaking publicly, the WWF team at the Intersessional (from WWF International, Senegal, and the UK) engaged actively with all governments in attendance. WWF appreciates that governments attending the IWC Intersessional agreed that they need to work to better **integrate input from civil society (NGOs)** into their deliberations.

WWF welcomes the discussion during this meeting on the need to **improve the scientific underpinning of IWC decision-making**. WWF is ready to work with governments to ensure that the work of the IWC Scientific Committee is fully incorporated into decisions made by the Commission itself, and that governments fully consider the input from the scientific community.

The IWC is at a crossroads, and 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 international community they can move forward. 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.

WWF calls upon all countries to take responsible action, to act in the best conservation interests of all cetaceans, and to move the IWC forward into the 21st Century. WWF wishes all participants a productive meeting.