

NOTE: This press release replaces that issued on 7 May 2010 as it contains a factual correction to the section 'A reduction in the number of whales killed'.

REVISED PRESS RELEASE: IWC Chair and Vice-Chair: 'If you really care about whale conservation - give our proposal a fair reading'

11 May 2010

On 22 April 2010, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) unveiled a draft 10-year peace plan to bring all whaling operations under full IWC control and to strengthen further and focus the work of the IWC on [conservation issues](#)¹. They did this in the context of the ongoing discussions within IWC regarding its [future](#)². When releasing their proposal, the Chair and Vice-Chair noted that it does not necessarily represent their own views regarding the content of a finally agreed document, but rather that they put it forward to facilitate the necessary further discussions leading up to the Annual Meeting of the Commission in June. Since the release of their proposal they have noticed a number of comments in the press and elsewhere that they feel require some response.

'The proposal was developed because most members of the IWC, whatever their views on whaling, recognised that the IWC was not doing a good enough job on whale conservation and the management of whaling' said Cristian Maquieira, Chair of the IWC. 'Given the wide range of views of our members, it had to be a compromise proposal – and that inevitably means that no-one gets everything they want – given the criticism we have received from all sides, we are probably not far off the correct balance! If we did not believe that this proposal was good for whales and considerably better than the present situation then we would not have put our names to it.'

'We expected and were prepared for a rough ride' said Anthony Liverpool, Vice-Chair, 'but we were prepared to do this for the benefit of conservation and management. We believe that all members have a shared goal of maintaining healthy whale populations and recovering depleted stocks and this proposal can help us reach that goal. All we ask is that people give the proposal a fair reading and look at it objectively. The proper comparison is not with whether it fully meets the ideals of one side or the other – but how it compares with the *status quo*. The equal balance of power within the IWC meant that no-one could expect to get everything they wanted under the *status quo* and this is equally true under our proposal which has to represent a compromise.'

'Once again, we repeat our plea for us all, despite our fundamental differences of views on whaling, to put these differences aside for a period so that we can focus on ensuring the world has healthy whale stocks.'

A whalers' charter or a balanced and realistic proposal?

Some have criticised the proposal by saying that it is a whalers' charter, that it is one-sided and that what some term 'loopholes' and others term 'rights under the Convention' remain. That really does not bear up to scrutiny when compared with the *status quo*. At present, non-indigenous whaling is carried out under various Articles of the Convention and changing the Convention to restrict or revise such rights is simply not feasible at present. Currently, with the moratorium in place, whales are being hunted, some in the Southern Ocean Sanctuary, and that is a simple fact. Under our proposal (in which the moratorium remains), although

¹ <http://www.iwcoffice.org/documents/commission/IWC62docs/press%20release%2022-04-10.pdf>

² <http://www.iwcoffice.org/commission/future.htm>

whaling, including in the Southern Ocean Sanctuary, will continue, there are marked differences. The three whaling countries, who can at present set unilateral limits (which have been rising) with no international checks on even whether those limits are being followed, would be agreeing to: IWC caps on the number of whales that can be caught that are below sustainable levels over the 10-year period; IWC caps that are significantly below current catch levels, let alone current unilaterally-set limits; IWC observers present on vessels and at land stations; and IWC-audited DNA registers. In addition, no other IWC member nations will be allowed to establish whaling operations. We recognise that these measures do not meet the needs of those who want a complete end to whaling now, but neither can it be characterised as a whalers' charter. We believe that it is undeniably better than the *status quo*.

A reduction in the number of whales killed

Since the moratorium decision, the number of whales taken outside IWC control has been rising. Our proposal, if adopted, will result in some 3,200³ fewer whales being killed in non-indigenous hunts over the 10-year period compared with the number that would be taken if the 2005-2009 catch levels continued and over 14,000 less than if the unilaterally set catch limits of 2009 were killed throughout the period.

The application of science

There has been criticism that the catch limits in our proposal do not have a scientific basis. In fact, the numbers are below, and in several cases well below, those that a group of scientists from both whaling and non-whaling countries agreed would be sustainable over the [10-year period](#)⁴, recognising that Scientific Committee's extremely conservative [Revised Management Procedure](#)⁵ would be applied immediately where possible, and within the 10-year period, where not. If the advice from the RMP is that the numbers should be lowered during the period, they will be lowered. It has been said that the proposal will allow catches of fin whales that have been classified as 'endangered' under the [IUCN Red list scheme](#)⁶ but it must be remembered that the Red List criteria have been developed for a different purpose and are dominated by the heavy fin whaling that occurred between the mid-1920s and mid-1960s in the Southern Hemisphere. The catch levels for the North Atlantic are below those that have been conservatively estimated to be safe by the RMP whilst those in the Southern Ocean go down from 10 per year at the start of the period (the present unilaterally set limit is 50) to 5 by the end of the period for populations that at least number in the several thousands.

Other major conservation benefits

Although the focus of media and public attention has naturally been on whaling operations, it must be recognised that our proposal contains far more than a table of proposed catch levels. The polarisation of views that has existed within the organisation has meant that there have been far fewer IWC-agreed and implemented conservation actions than there should have been. There are greater threats to whale populations than controlled and regulated whaling and action on these is needed. Our proposal addresses these and other issues. Specifically it will enable the Commission to:

- focus on the recovery of depleted whale stocks and take actions on key conservation issues, including bycatch, climate change and other environmental threats, including the establishment of Conservation Plans for the most endangered populations;
- create a South Atlantic Sanctuary;

³ This now incorporates the most recent (2009) catch data for all areas.

⁴ <http://www.iwcoffice.org/documents/commission/future/IWC-M10-SWG6.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.iwcoffice.org/conservation/rmp.htm>

⁶ <http://www.iucnredlist.org/apps/redlist/details/2478/0>

- recognise the non-lethal value and uses of whales, such as whalewatching, as a management option for coastal states and address related scientific, conservation and management issues of such uses;
- set a decisive direction to the future work of the IWC including measures to reform the governance of the Commission.

While such actions are less headline-grabbing than those related to whaling, they have the potential to produce much greater overall benefits to whale conservation, especially for those critically endangered populations such as North Atlantic right whales and western North Pacific gray whales.

Strengthened negotiations during the 10-year period

There is no doubt that there are fundamental differences over whales and whaling within our 88 member nation Commission. These include differences over issues such as the research conducted under special permit, whaling under objections and reservation, the commercial whaling moratorium and international trade. Such differences are not easily resolved. That is why our proposal exists – to provide a framework to allow us all to address these differences in a calm manner, and sooner rather than later. That simply has not happened in the years after the moratorium decision. But those differences must be addressed honestly and in-depth - that is why we have included a firm timetable and mechanism for addressing these to be completed before the end of the 10-year period. And we propose that discussions start at this year's Annual Meeting in June. No-one can predict the outcome of such negotiations but it is clear to us that without a change in the *status quo*, there will be no possibility of these discussions succeeding. In the meantime, no government is being asked to change their fundamental positions on matters of principle or prejudicing their future rights regarding these difficult issues.