

Statement by the United States, introducing document IWC/62/26

The United States and Denmark submitted this proposal to try and build on the cooperative atmosphere that has resulted from the past year of discussions. Throughout the Support Group process, it was agreed that in any compromise on the future of the IWC, the Commission was supportive of aboriginal subsistence whaling under the existing management measures. In addition, there was consensus support for replacing the word aboriginal with indigenous, in order to help bring the terminology of the IWC into the 21st century. Everyone agreed that subsistence whaling needed to be separated from the discussion about other types of whaling.

We have heard consensus around this room that the discussions on the future of the IWC should continue after a “pause” for reflection. As a representative from one of four countries in this room that represents indigenous people that hunt for subsistence purposes, I have grave concerns about this approach. This means that when we do get around to talking about the key issues in the IWC, subsistence whaling will be another issue that was deferred until later, until a time when these people will be dependent upon receiving a quota immediately to meet their subsistence needs. Indigenous subsistence hunters will then be used as a negotiating chip by both sides, as has been the case for the past decade.

Aboriginal subsistence whaling fulfils the nutritional and cultural needs of native communities. Indigenous hunters have the utmost respect for the animals they hunt and the environment and habitat that they live in. They have gone to great lengths to continue to comply with all of the measures that this body has introduced over the years, and repeatedly worked within this Commission constructively even though they have been treated as a pawn in political negotiations.

While many of these indigenous people having been hunting whales sustainably for thousands of years, it was the industrialized whaling that occurred over the past century that brought many stocks of whales to the brink of extinction. I find it quite ironic and fundamentally unfair that while uncontrolled commercial whaling continues to increase despite the moratorium, the only type of whaling that is managed by the IWC is the indigenous whaling, which is about 15% of the whaling that currently occurs.

Therefore, Mr. Chairman, we are proposing here to give some relief to these communities and people by extending their catch limits and taking their needs off the table while this body determines what to do about its future. The existing management measures, including periodic and annual review by the Commission and Scientific Committee, will continue to apply. While we continue to seek an end to our longstanding disputes, it would be a shame, and reflect our worst tendencies, if the rights of indigenous peoples to hunt whales for subsistence continued to be used as a bargaining chip by both pro- and anti-whaling governments seeking to get something in return. We know that has happened in the past. Commission actions with regard to subsistence hunts must be based on merit – on science and need – not politics.

This is an important issue that needs to be discussed. The communities that depend on indigenous subsistence whaling deserve the certainty this amendment provides. Many delegations stated during the discussion last week on the future that they would prefer to see indigenous subsistence whaling separated out and set aside so the Commission could focus on other issues. I hope all delegates will support this amendment, but I can only interpret from prior interventions that the fate of indigenous subsistence whaling will remain tied to discussions on the future of the organisation.