



IWC/64/OS Cyprus

**64th ANNUAL MEETING
OF THE INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION**

**OPENING STATEMENT BY CYPRUS ON BEHALF
OF THE EU AND ITS MEMBER STATES**

At this meeting, Cyprus, currently holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, will be speaking on behalf of the European Union and its Member States. In this context, we note that Greenland and the Faeroe Islands are Danish Overseas Territories but not European Union Territories. Should divergences arise between the interests of the European Union and those of the afore-mentioned territories, Denmark may need to intervene on their behalf to pursue the latter's interests.

We wish to express our gratitude to the State of Panama, for its generosity and hospitality in hosting this meeting and for the very warm welcome we have all received from the local authorities and the people of Panama City.

As we have stated in the past, the EU and its Member States are strongly committed to the protection of whales and acknowledge that an effective conservation and management regime can only be created through joint efforts and by initiatives that promote mutual trust and cooperation between IWC parties.

We note with satisfaction the momentum that began four years ago and which, now, seems to be bearing fruits. Last year, in Jersey, an important step was taken in improving transparency within the IWC. We believe this step pointed the way towards the gradual transformation of the IWC into a fully functioning international agreement that can ensure the effective conservation and management of whales worldwide, bringing all whaling operations under its control and guaranteeing a significant improvement in the conservation status of whales in the long term.

We remain convinced that, undertaking specific steps to move governance reforms forward and, generally, improve the overall effectiveness of the Convention, will not only result in tangible benefits in terms of increased protection and better management practices but will also sustain and reinforce the spirit of partnership among members, in the realisation of a common objective. In this regard, we also recall the follow-up action that will be needed in order to consider the role of observers at Commission meetings based on experience gained so far, as was agreed last year in Jersey.

This year, the IWC is called to deal with a number of crucial issues, touching upon the core of its functioning, both in terms of process and in terms of substance. Among such issues, the setting of the next set of ASW quotas must figure most prominently. The EU and its Member States are committed to protecting the rights of indigenous peoples, including the protection of their livelihoods. In this light, we reaffirm the role of aboriginal subsistence whaling to satisfy aboriginal subsistence needs. In considering the related proposals, we are to be further guided by the precautionary principle and the advice of the Scientific Committee, taking also into account existing requirements and the work undertaken within the IWC Ad Hoc ASW Working Group.

Sound science and reliable information are, indeed, essential if we are to enhance the conservation status of whales and cetaceans, in general. We, therefore, note with satisfaction the work done under the State of the Cetacean Environment Report (SOCER), which provides a non-technical periodic summary of the positive and negative events, developments and conditions in the marine environment. Indeed, over the past years, there has been mounting evidence of degradation of marine biodiversity along with potential harm to ecosystem services and functioning. The increasing presence of high levels of organic contaminants and heavy metals, as well as pathogens, in the marine environment has been taking its toll on the conservation status of cetaceans and could, in certain specific cases, also entail effects on human health. The issue is not new to the IWC. We believe, however, that the time has come to revisit it and inject it with new momentum. With this in mind, we, the EU Member States party to the IWC, have submitted a draft 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*. We hope we will be able to count on the support of all other IWC members and are ready to discuss specific aspects of it, in the aim of its adoption. We would be also ready to discuss and support other proposals that touch upon the broader, though related, issue of animal welfare.

We note a further number of proposed amendments to the Schedule. Our position on some of these amendments has been stated in the past and remains, in essence, unaltered. Thus, we would in principle welcome the creation of a South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary, just as we would still not be in a position to support the introduction of any new types of whaling. On other proposals, we would like to express our willingness to discuss with the proponents and achieve better understanding of their rationale.

Finally, we would like to extend our thanks and congratulations to the Secretariat, the Intersessional Group and the Working Group for the provision of Assistance to Governments of Limited Means for their work and the excellent documentation prepared on the difficult and complicated issue of moving to biennial meetings and on the question of providing assistance to Governments of limited means, both of which initiatives we can generally support in principle. We are looking forward to an exchange of views that will build on the need to safeguard and improve the effectiveness of the work of the Commission, as well as its transparency.

The EU and its Member States will work actively and constructively to ensure that this 64th annual meeting will be successful and produce tangible results.
