

**United States Opening Statement
IWC 64 Panama City, Panama**

The United States is pleased to be in Panama City, Panama, to participate in the 64th annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC). We are very grateful to the Government of Panama for its hospitality, and the Secretariat for all of its work arranging these wonderful facilities. The United States is a global leader in whale conservation, and the list of U.S. whale conservation initiatives spans the full range of current threats to whales. In addition, this is an important meeting for the United States due to the review of the aboriginal subsistence whaling catch limits.

Aboriginal subsistence whaling is based on the nutritional and cultural needs of Native communities, not on commercial incentive. Coastal communities across Alaska have depended on bowhead whales for millennia, and they continue to rely on annual hunts for their nutritional and cultural needs. The Makah Tribe has a documented history of whaling activities that date back at least 2,000 years, and whaling continues to be of central importance to their Tribal culture, identity, and health. We acknowledge the great contributions of the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission and the North Slope Borough in supporting research that is used to manage the hunt for bowhead whales. We would also like to thank the Makah Tribe for its important scientific contributions on eastern North Pacific gray whales.

We note that the Commission has identified outstanding issues related to aboriginal subsistence whaling. Therefore, over the past year the United States has participated in the Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling Working Group that is addressing these issues, with the view of improving the management of aboriginal subsistence whaling. This Working Group has been effective in addressing issues regarding aboriginal subsistence whaling, and we appreciate the efforts of all its members.

We also note that the Scientific Committee has advised that continuation of the bowhead and gray whale aboriginal subsistence whaling catch limits is sustainable and we trust that IWC members will support, by consensus, updating those catch limits based upon that scientific advice. We remain committed to following the advice of the Scientific Committee with regard to bowhead and gray whales.

The United States continues to fully support the moratorium on commercial whaling. The commercial whaling moratorium has been an effective conservation and management measure to combat the long history of overexploitation by commercial whaling in the past. The United States also continues to fully support the establishment of a South Atlantic Sanctuary. In our view, the sanctuary will provide range states with new opportunities to advance whale conservation. Recognizing that effective conservation and management of cetaceans requires international cooperation, the United States urges IWC members to address issues in a constructive manner that allows us to conserve our shared whale resources for future generations.

The United States is a global leader in whale conservation. We have taken a number of steps to reduce the threat of ship strikes, including operational measures for vessels, education and outreach programs, technological and other research, and monitoring activities. In particular, the

United States has submitted a proposal to the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to amend two Traffic Separation Schemes off the U.S. West Coast to reduce the likelihood of ship strikes to blue and other large whales. In addition, the United States has been a leader in developing guidelines for responsible whale watching, and has served as Chair of the Standing Working Group on Whale Watching. Whale watching is a growing industry worldwide and is now an important source of jobs and education in many coastal communities. Economic development and environmental conservation can be mutually beneficial through whale watching. The United States is also a leader in cetacean disentanglement efforts, and representatives of our Large Whale Disentanglement Program have helped conduct disentanglement training workshops worldwide. Lastly, we have conducted extensive conservation-related research domestically and through the IWC.

One important sign of progress at the IWC is that conservation issues are an increasingly important part of the IWC's agenda. While the status of many whale stocks is unknown, we remain concerned about the status of the many populations that suffered from extensive commercial whaling. It is imperative that the Commission focuses more of its attention on growing conservation problems such as climate change, by-catch, marine debris, disentanglement, pollution and ocean noise, which are increasingly detrimental to cetacean populations and their habitat. The United States looks forward to addressing these and other issues as we move forward in the 2012 IWC meeting. Frank and constructive discussion by member countries will help further whale conservation worldwide.

The United States is concerned about the effectiveness of the Commission to conserve whales and manage whaling. We would like to see the IWC preserved as the premiere international forum to solve current and emerging whale conservation issues and coordinate critical research. Unfortunately, the number of whales being taken each year has risen steadily and three member countries persist in non-indigenous hunting of whales, outside of IWC control. The United States continues to believe that going back to confrontation and deadlock at the IWC is not productive. Therefore, the United States will focus on maintaining a cooperative atmosphere while taking meaningful actions that result in real progress toward whale conservation and reforming the Commission. In particular, we strongly support improving the participation of observers in Commission meetings and believe that public participation by civil society is key to making the Commission a modern, effective organization.

We hope that all member nations will cooperate on meaningful conservation efforts, as well as take important steps to reform the Commission.