

Instituto de  
Conservación  
de Ballenas



## OPENING STATEMENT

**64th Annual Meeting of the International Whaling Commission  
July 2012, Panama**

**INSTITUTO DE CONSERVACIÓN DE BALLENAS**

[www.icb.org.ar](http://www.icb.org.ar)

The Instituto de Conservación de Ballenas (ICB, Whale Conservation Institute), a non-governmental organization based in Argentina, congratulates the Republic of Panama for hosting the 64th Annual Meeting of the IWC. The Panamanian shores are visited by whales, that not only fascinate those who come to observe them, but also create an active whale watching industry, bringing economic, social, cultural and educational benefits to the coastal communities.

We would like to highlight the joint efforts of the Republic of Panama in cooperation with the other Latin American members of the Buenos Aires Group to promote research, conservation initiatives and the non-lethal use of whales. We support their strong commitment to maintain the moratorium on commercial whaling, their initiatives to stop scientific whaling and whaling under objection, the promotion of the non-lethal use of whales, animal welfare and ethic issues, the respect for the existing Whale Sanctuaries and the support for the creation of the proposed South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary.

As part of our work as an organization dedicated to whale conservation and non-lethal research, we are here to bring the voice of thousands of people from Argentina and Latin America who wish to see the permanent end of whaling in all of its forms.

In this opportunity, we have decided not to address our preoccupation for the serious and complex situation in the IWC, that has prevented it from moving forward with its modernization, and to adapt to the legitimate interests of the vast majority of the world's societies who wish to protect whales. Instead, we prefer to address the principles that should be the foundation of every nation's efforts to stop whaling and guarantee oceans that are safe for whales.

Thus, we urge all IWC member countries to base their decisions on the following considerations, which make whaling in the 21st century a reprehensible and unjustified activity. In order to establish the rational and moral bases for the management of cetaceans, we quote Robbins Barstow, who proposes five categories by which whales are special and unique animals.

**First, whales are biologically special.** For instance, sperm whales have the largest brain that has ever existed, and humpback whales are the creators of the longest non-human songs known.

**Second, whales are ecologically special.** Given their large body mass and their world-wide distribution in all oceans, whales are carbon reservoirs that help to reduce global warming. If we allowed whale populations to recover from the whaling operations of the past centuries, their combined biomass could remove 9 million tons of carbon from the atmosphere, thus reducing the greenhouse effect. This equals the effect that a temperate forest of nearly 11,000 square kilometers has in the regulation of atmospheric gases. If the vast majority among us wishes to protect such a forest for the benefit of all, why not protect whales with the same aim?

**Third, whales are culturally special for humans.** Living cetaceans have an almost unbelievable capacity for enriching the lives of human beings with whom they come in peaceful contact. There is a mystique about them that inspires a sense of wonder and exhilaration among persons from all races and nations, in ways that no other animal species has equaled so widely. Cetaceans are so fascinating to most people that they have become powerful tools for environmental education among people of all ages.

**Fourth, whales are politically special.** Their living space does not fall within clearly defined national boundaries. Their territory is largely the global commons: the seas of the world, which do not belong to any one nation and thus they constitute a unique global resource. This is why whales fall under international control, and given that they are not a national resource, no country can claim the moral right to kill them.

**Fifth, whales are symbolically special.** More than any other form of non-human life, whales have come to symbolize the concern for the environment, and are a source of inspiration to conserve the interrelations between all life forms in our planet.

We believe that these rational considerations are sufficient to completely stop the hunting of whales and dolphins in all oceans. However, the end of whaling may only come when we humans listen to our feelings more than to our intelligence.

Beyond all technical, biological, political, economical and management arguments, we urge each and every IWC commissioner to think about these considerations when making their decisions about the life or the death of whales. In addition, we invite all commissioners to carefully think about the fact that every whale is not simply "another one" among an undefined mass of whales in the sea. Every single whale is an individual, with a unique life history, that in some cases extends well over two centuries. Every whale has grandparents, parents, sisters, brothers, sons and daughters, and has a personality (or a "whale-kind"?) of its own.

So, when we come to think about it, or better, to feel about it, can we now, in the 21st century, carry on with whale slaughters, regardless of their aim?

We hope that this IWC annual meeting will be a turning point in the course of this forum. We must reflect on the future we want for whales and for ourselves, as the thinking and sentient beings that we are. As a Latin American civil organization, we fervently hope the South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary will be created, to ensure that our oceans will become a safe home where whales can live in peace instead of dying under the power of the harpoon.