

Extract from the Chair's Proposals for a way forward on the RMS

Preface to Chair's Proposals:

Why an RMS is needed

The 1946 International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling clearly gives IWC a dual mandate, i.e. both the conservation and the management of whaling and whale stocks; these are not mutually exclusive but directly inter-related. It is for the following reasons that I believe that an RMS is essential for the credibility of the IWC.

It is a fact that whales are being caught by some IWC members. While recognising and respecting the different views on whaling held by member nations, from the point of view of conservation and wise management, it is best that whaling is managed using a scientific, consistent and fair approach. The highly migratory behaviour of the large whales makes international co-operation on management essential and the IWC is best placed to fulfil this management role. However, at present our organisation is not generally seen to be working effectively and indeed the present polarised views and actions are, I believe, detrimental to conservation.

The IWC Scientific Committee spent several years developing the RMP - the most advanced method for the conservation and management of a natural resource. This procedure was developed specifically for baleen whales with the aim of maintaining all whale stocks at healthy levels and avoiding the problems identified with past scientific management approaches, particularly by taking scientific uncertainty specifically into account in accordance with the Precautionary Principle. As already mentioned, this approach was agreed by the Commission in 1994 but has not yet been implemented. If implemented today, the RMP would only allow catches of some stocks of minke whales. It would not result, contrary to popular opinion in some countries, in a 'free for all' on all stocks of all whale species.

As has been recognised since at least 1992, effective conservation and management measures developed using the RMP must be accompanied by a modern supervision and control system (i.e. the RMS) that ensures that those measures are not only obeyed, but are seen to be obeyed. However, despite some nine years of discussions, agreement on the RMS has still not been reached.

I strongly believe that if the IWC is to fulfil its role in the conservation and management of whale stocks and to avoid past errors, real effort must be made to complete the RMS expeditiously. To do this parties must respect the views of others, and in that light, develop a package of measures that is as broadly acceptable as possible whilst meeting the agreed objectives in the most practical and cost effective manner. Building on the progress made in a number of important areas and working in good faith, it should be possible to rapidly complete this work, thereby ensuring the conservation and management of whale stocks for the future, restoring the credibility of the IWC as an effective organisation and providing an example of how modern natural resource management should be carried out. Failure to put an RMS in place will jeopardise the future of the IWC and serves neither the interests of whale conservation nor management.