

WWF POSITION STATEMENT: 64TH INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION (IWC) MEETING

WWF's goal is to ensure that viable populations of all cetacean species occupy their historic range, and fulfil their role in maintaining the integrity of ocean ecosystems. WWF acknowledges the widely varied cultural attitudes toward the conservation and management of whales, but continues to oppose commercial whaling - now and until whale stocks have fully recovered, and the governments of the world have brought whaling fully under international control with a precautionary and conservation-based enforceable management and compliance system adhered to by all whaling nations.

CONSERVATION AND THE IWC

The marine environment has never before been under such heavy cumulative pressures. Bycatch, ocean noise, chemical pollution, habitat destruction, unsustainable fishing, oil and gas exploration and development, shipping, aquaculture, marine debris and climate change are all taking their toll on cetaceans and their habitats, and in turn, are threatening local communities that depend on coastal environments for their livelihoods and survival. In order for the IWC to fulfil its purpose, it must tackle these growing pressures to cetaceans and their habitats. This will be a challenge, but also presents an opportunity for the IWC to become a world leading body in marine conservation. Continued resistance within the IWC to deal with conservation issues, when almost all multilateral agreements concerned with management of natural resources are moving in the opposite direction, will further erode the IWC's relevance and ability to achieve its mandate.

The IWC has already made considerable progress on cetacean conservation, through its Scientific Committee, Conservation Committee and through numerous Commission resolutions. **WWF strongly urges all IWC Contracting Parties – whatever their views on whaling - to strengthen the IWC's conservation agenda. Specifically, WWF encourages Contracting Parties to take proactive leadership on priority cetacean conservation issues, and provide increased funding for the conservation work of the IWC Scientific Committee, the Conservation Committee and its programmes of work. Critically, WWF recommends that all Contracting Parties address as a priority the threats to cetaceans both in their waters and on the high seas.**

ANTHROPOGENIC NOISE

Ocean noise is an increasing threat to cetaceans, animals that depend on sound to navigate, communicate, find food, find a mate and avoid predators; in short to survive. Anthropogenic sound from increasing human activities in the ocean, including oil and gas exploration and shipping, can disrupt these vital behaviours. WWF applauds the efforts of the Scientific Committee to better understand the impacts of anthropogenic noise on cetaceans and to make recommendations for further research and management. WWF also commends the work of the US government Cetaceans and Sound (CetSound) work to map underwater sound and cetacean density and distribution. **WWF strongly urges all IWC Contracting Parties to implement the recommendations of the Scientific Committee on anthropogenic noise and to support expansion of the US CetSound mapping tools on a global scale. In addition, WWF urges IWC Contracting Parties to take proactive leadership in the establishment of a Working Group on Ocean Noise under the auspices of the Conservation Committee.**

SOUTH ATLANTIC WHALE SANCTUARY

WWF strongly supports the proposal from Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and South Africa to establish a whale sanctuary in the South Atlantic. **WWF urges all IWC Contracting Parties to support this proposal.**

SOUTHERN OCEAN WHALE SANCTUARY

The Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary is critical to ensuring the recovery and viability of whale populations in the southern hemisphere,¹ and an existing sanctuary, where commercial whaling is prohibited. **WWF believes it is an unquestionable responsibility of all Contracting Governments to the IWC to ensure that the Southern Ocean**

¹ For a full scientific review of the impacts of climate change on Southern Ocean whales, see http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/endangered_species/cetaceans/cetaceans/iwc/resources/?165561/Whales-set-to-chase-shrinking-feed-zones

Whale Sanctuary is respected and that no takes of any cetacean species, including through ‘scientific research’, are authorized in this zone.²

ICELAND FIN WHALE HUNT

Whilst we are aware that there have been conflicting reports as to whether fin whaling will take place this year, WWF remains deeply concerned that the fin whale hunt could resume. Iceland’s previous fin whale quota of 150 animals per year is more than three times the catch limit that would be recommended by the IWC’s approved quota calculation method if the commercial whaling moratorium was not in place. Fin whales are listed as an endangered species by IUCN. US President Barak Obama said in a message to Congress³ in September 2011 that Iceland’s fin whale hunt was of “particular concern,” and that “Iceland’s actions threaten the conservation status of an endangered species and undermine multilateral efforts to ensure greater worldwide protection for whales.” **WWF urges the government of Iceland to adhere to the internationally agreed moratorium on commercial whaling and publically commit to permanently halting its fin whale hunt.**

ARCTIC CETACEANS

Arctic cetaceans face a raft of threats, arguably the greatest being those resulting from climate change, expanding oil and gas exploration and operations, and increased shipping. Arctic cetaceans are also critically important to the Arctic peoples for cultural and subsistence purposes. WWF welcomes the commitment made by Contracting Governments at IWC62 to undertake a workshop on anthropogenic impacts on Arctic cetaceans, under the auspices of the Scientific Committee.

One anticipated outcome from the workshop would be identification of critical cetacean habitats in the Arctic, and agreement on conservation recommendations for those areas. In particular, given the increased threat posed by shipping and oil and gas exploration and development to Arctic cetaceans, WWF encourages the workshop to identify management measures required to limit the impact of these industrial activities on Arctic cetaceans.

WWF encourages all Contracting Governments, particularly those in the Arctic or with Arctic territories, to provide the technical and financial resources necessary to ensure the effectiveness and success of the Arctic anthropogenic impacts workshop. WWF would also encourage a focus not only on recommendations regarding scientific research, but primarily on conservation recommendations. Finally, WWF urges all Arctic governments to commit to rapidly implementing the recommendations of this workshop, thus safeguarding Arctic cetaceans and the communities that rely on them.

WESTERN NORTH PACIFIC GRAY WHALES

The IWC has repeatedly addressed and made recommendations on the conservation of the critically endangered western North Pacific gray whale (WGW)⁴, and the IWC64 Scientific Committee report notes that “*the status of gray whales in the western North Pacific may be of greater concern than is currently recognised.*” WWF is extremely concerned about upcoming oil projects and their impact on WGW, in particular two new proposed platforms, one adjacent to the WGW near-shore feeding area and one adjacent to the WGW offshore feeding area.

- Near-shore: Proposed construction of a third platform as part of Sakhalin II⁵ is opposed by 20 NGOs⁶. Original plans for Sakhalin II required only two platforms to develop the field, and we strongly believe those agreed plans should be adhered to, as no reasonable explanation for an additional platform has been given. The IWC64 Scientific Committee report notes that “*the [Western Gray Whale Advisory Panel] has expressed concerns about plans to install a third offshore platform ... just offshore of the gray whale feeding ground.*” **WWF calls on the Russian government to reject plans for a third platform under Sakhalin II.**
- Offshore: Proposed construction by Exxon Neftegas Ltd (ENL) of new platform (Arktun Dagi). ENL has not submitted its project details to the advisory panel, which could provide the best scientific recommendations for mitigation measures, as well as assess the cumulative impacts with other projects. **WWF calls on the Russian government to prevent the construction of this platform so close to the WGW feeding ground, at least until**

² For a report on the importance of strengthening the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary, please see http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/all_publications/?193792/Save-the-Whale-Save-the-Southern-Ocean

³ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/09/15/message-president-congress>

⁴ See IWC resolutions 2005-3, 2004-1, 2001-3

⁵ Visit the following link for more information www.thelast130.org

⁶ See http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/wgwap_10_inf_1a_ngo_statement_of_concern_sakhalin_ii_march_2011.pdf

the cumulative impact has be assessed, and to require ENL and all other companies operating around Sakhalin to provide advanced information on their activities and monitoring data to the advisory panel.

In May 2011, the Russian government imposed a seasonal restriction requiring developers of a newly available concession to conduct activities only from late November to late May, when the whales are away from their feeding grounds around the island. **WWF calls on the Russian government to expand this regulation to all other projects that are in the vicinity of critical feeding habitat for the whales. WWF calls on all Contracting Governments to implement similar time-space closures for oil and gas operations in their own waters where overlap with cetacean habitats occurs.**

CRITICALLY ENDANGERED SMALL CETACEANS

WWF is extremely concerned about the conservation status of several species of small cetacean worldwide, in particular the impact of bycatch on these animals. Bycatch is estimated to kill 300,000 whales, dolphins and porpoises each year. Two critically endangered small cetacean species, both threatened by bycatch, require particularly urgent attention:

- Maui's dolphins, a subspecies of Hector's dolphins, are critically endangered with only about 55 animals over the age of one year remaining. The IWC64 Scientific Committee report expressed "*particular concern about the low abundance of Maui's dolphins.*" Scientists have identified entanglement in gillnets and capture by inshore trawl fisheries as the greatest threats to these dolphins. **WWF acknowledges the positive steps taken to date, but given the urgent conservation situation, we call on the New Zealand government to act immediately to further protect Maui's dolphins by banning the use of gillnets and inshore trawling throughout the dolphins' entire current and historic range and to guarantee compliance for all vessels operating within their habitat.**
- The vaquita is the world's most critically endangered marine cetacean species and lives only in the upper Gulf of California, Mexico. Despite significant government efforts, the vaquita population is still declining and now likely consists of fewer than 200 individuals. The Vaquita Refuge protects only about half the population and gillnet fishing continues both inside (illegally) and outside the refuge. The IWC64 Scientific Committee report "*reiterates its extreme concern for the status of [the vaquita] and, as stated in 2011 (IWC, 2012r), reaffirms that the only reliable approach for saving the species is to eliminate vaquita bycatch by removing entangling gear from areas where the animals occur. It strongly recommends that, if extinction is to be avoided, all gillnets should be removed from the upper Gulf of California immediately.*" **WWF commends the government of Mexico for positive steps taken to date, and further calls on Mexico to enforce a complete ban on gillnet use within the entire habitat of the vaquita.**

HIGHLY MIGRATORY CETACEANS AND OCEAN GOVERNANCE

Many cetaceans are highly migratory, with species requiring the territories of multiple nations as well as the high seas to survive. It is imperative that they are protected from threats across their range, not only for their own survival, but also to allow continued non-lethal use of cetaceans by many developing countries; whale watching is estimated to be worth US\$2.1 billion per year worldwide. In particular, there are large catches of highly migratory species of cetaceans within the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary by Japan, which are not regulated by any international forum.

WWF strongly urges IWC Contracting Parties to support Resolution IWC/64/11, which calls the attention of the international community to the circumstance that massive unregulated catches of highly migratory species of cetaceans continue to take place beyond the effective control of the IWC, including within the IWC Southern Ocean Sanctuary.

ABORIGINAL SUBSISTENCE WHALING QUOTAS

WWF recognises the human need for subsistence whaling and supports the take where it is carried out by aboriginal, indigenous, or native peoples with long-standing, traditional, strong social or cultural ties to whaling; where products are for native consumption only; and with a precautionary management scheme in place to ensure such activities are sustainable and do not threaten whale populations.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

IWC64 provides a significant opportunity to bring the IWC up to date with modern standards by strengthening its conservation agenda. IWC64 should have a particularly strong conservation focus given that many key conservation topics were not given time for discussion at IWC63. WWF strongly urges all Contracting Governments to work together in this effort, and as the world's largest conservation organization, WWF stands ready to offer its full support.