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Mr Lee Myung-Bak
President
1 Cheongwadae-ro,
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Dear Mr Myung-Bak,

I am writing to you to express my concern about Korea intending to resume whaling. On July 4 2012 at the 64th annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) in Panama City, Dr. Joon-Suk Kang, Head of the Republic of Korea Delegation, announced that the Korean government is currently considering conducting whaling for scientific research to analyze and accumulate biological and ecological data on the minke whales migrating off the Korean peninsula.

Such whaling would directly impact the minke whale J-stock of the North Pacific, considered threatened and in decline, and therefore recognized by the IWC as a Protected Stock. According to the IUCN Red List, this population already faces the threat of bycatch in the waters of South Korea, Japan and China. With reporting far from complete, the total catches exceed 200 per year over the last 10 years. The IWC's Scientific Committee has expressed concern about the continued high level of catches from this population, which is already unsustainable.

Although the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling contains a provision under Article VIII that allows governments to issue their own lethal research permits, it was written more than 50 years ago, at a time when no practicable alternatives existed. Today non-lethal techniques have been developed that provide the data required for management much more efficiently and accurately than lethal sampling. For instance, a skin sample taken with a biopsy dart from a live whale can provide genetic analysis and stable isotope analysis to understand whales' diet, sex, reproductive condition, and stock boundaries. This technique has been applied in whale studies all over the world.

While we have seen recent media articles suggesting that Korea may reconsider the announcement made at IWC, an official decision seems to be pending. WWF kindly requests the Government of the Republic of Korea to reconsider starting a scientific whaling programme, recommends improved monitoring of current whale takes and bycatch; and supports the ongoing efforts by Korean institutions to develop non-lethal cetacean research as well as the non-lethal use of whales in whale-watching operations.



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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. We hope the Government of Korea will set the example as host to the World Conservation Congress in Jeju next September, by officially moving away from lethal whale use and research, and instead supporting the sustainable non-lethal use of whales in Korean waters.

Respectfully yours,

James P Leape
Director General