

IWC intersessional meeting in Rome, March 9-11, 2009

A proposed “package deal” that would allow Japan a five year coastal whaling quota in exchange for phasing out or reducing its so-called scientific whaling program in the Southern Ocean is not an acceptable compromise as it does not do enough to protect whales according to WWF.

The package deal was discussed at a three day meeting in Rome on 9-11 March attended by just over half of the 84 member governments of the IWC, and is part of an attempt to resolve the current impasse in the IWC between pro-whaling and anti-whaling nations. WWF attended the meeting as an official observer.

This meeting was an opportunity for IWC member governments to come up with a plan that would move the IWC forward for the benefit of whales but few innovative suggestions that would contribute to a feasible solution were made.

The chair of the IWC, William Hogarth, has passed the task of drafting a package deal to the Small Working Group (SWG), which will present their report on 18 May. The package deal will then be discussed and voted on at the 61st meeting of the IWC in Madeira, Portugal in June. Dr Hogarth is the IWC Commissioner for the United States.

WWF has been working with the IWC, and on whaling, for decades. WWF fully supports a resolution to the deadlock in the IWC, but believes that such a resolution must benefit whales more than whaling. WWF appreciates the fact that the IWC member governments are engaging each other in discussion but finds the package deal discussed at the meeting has some major loop holes and problems. WWF has several suggestions for the SWG as they go forward with drafting a new deal, including the following:

- All “scientific whaling” must be stopped immediately;
- All whaling nations, not just Japan, must be considered in any deal;
- There must be clear mechanisms for compliance, monitoring and sanctions against countries that break the rules; and,
- The Revised Management Procedure (RMP), agreed by the IWC in 1994 and one of the most rigorous procedures for natural resource management yet developed, must be included in any deal involving quota setting.

Without these and several other provisions in the deal, whale populations already depleted from the unregulated whaling of the past century will continue to suffer from the actions of irresponsible whaling nations.

WWF looks forward to discussing with governments all of the elements of the SWG report and hopes that the SWG’s decisions are based on sound, robust science and for the benefit of the world’s whales. WWF continues to work with all governments on the

conservation and recovery of whale species, and the reduction of all threats to whales and dolphins including bycatch, ship strikes, pollution, noise, habitat loss, and climate change.