

WWF OPENING STATEMENT

63rd INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION (IWC) MEETING

WWF's goal is to ensure that viable populations of all cetacean species occupy their historic range, and fulfill 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. 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.

FUTURE OF THE IWC

Today, populations of nearly all the great whales are at depressed levels, a legacy of unsustainable commercial whaling during the last two centuries. Whilst commercial whaling remains a concern, in the 21st century other threats may ultimately be exacting a greater toll on the world's whales. The 2011 IWC Scientific Committee Report (IWC/63/Rep1) noted that "marine environmental trends of concern include widespread global declines in marine biodiversity and the poor conservation status of marine species and fish stocks." The direct impacts of oil and gas exploration and development, shipping, and bycatch – which kills an estimated 300,000 whales, dolphins and porpoises each year – are also a severe concern. The IWC must tackle these growing pressures to whales 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 Environmental Agreements (MEAs) 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 Governments – whatever their views on whaling - to strengthen the IWC's conservation agenda. Specifically, WWF urges Contracting Governments to provide increased funding for the conservation work of the IWC Scientific Committee, the Conservation Committee and its programmes of work. WWF also urges all Contracting Governments to address as a priority the threats to cetaceans both in their waters and on the high seas.**

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE IWC

WWF welcomes the UK resolution and document (IWC/63/F&A 4)¹ on improving the effectiveness of operations within the IWC. The UK resolution and document address a number of important issues and suggests changes that are crucial to bring the IWC in line with other international agreements. WWF works within the context of many MEAs which operate more effectively than the IWC in terms of transparency, timely production of public reports and agreed decisions, financial procedures, delegate sponsorship and NGO participation.² WWF believes the proposals made by the UK are the bare minimum required to bring the IWC up to these basic and widely accepted international standards. **WWF strongly urges all IWC Contracting Parties to support the resolution submitted by the UK government, and all the reforms proposed in document IWC/63/F&A 4.**

REVISED MANAGEMENT PROCEDURE

Due to the previous effects of vastly unsustainable commercial whaling, from which many whale species have still failed to fully recover, all IWC Contracting Governments must be fully committed to caution in all management decisions. As such, WWF strongly opposes any moves to weaken the IWC's Revised Management Procedure (RMP). **WWF urges all Contracting Governments to ensure the RMP is maintained in its original form, and that the agreed tuning level of 0.72 is used in all RMP calculations.**

¹ Available publically at <http://archive.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-pets/wildlife/protect/whales/documents/iwc63-improve-iwc-operations.pdf>

² A WWF report on governance of the IWC in relation to other MEAs, and recommendations for governance reforms that would be appropriate for the IWC/ICRW, please see <http://assets.panda.org/downloads/governancepaper.pdf>

WHALE SANCTUARIES

WWF urges the Contracting Governments of the IWC to respect the wishes of range states and support the establishment of additional IWC sanctuaries for whales. WWF strongly supports the proposal from Brazil to establish a whale sanctuary in the South Atlantic, a region in which whale-watching has been steadily increasing, providing ecotourism income, benefits for local communities, and research opportunities. **WWF urges all IWC Contracting Parties to support the proposal from Brazil to establish a whale sanctuary in the South Atlantic.**

OCEAN NOISE

Whales use sound as their primary sense, and industrial activities such as oil and gas development, particularly in the exploration phase, shipping, industrial extraction, marine construction or military activities are creating a cacophony of noise that can have a severe impact on the ability of whales to survive. Anthropogenic noise is making critical behaviours – like navigating, finding food, finding a mate, and avoiding predators – more difficult, if not impossible. Industrial sounds can “mask” or drown out the sounds animals use to communicate or avoid danger, and excessive noise can temporarily or permanently damage cetacean hearing³. The IWC Scientific Committee has conducted significant work on anthropogenic noise, and the 2011 report “recommends that collaborative arrangements be made with military and industry authorities to ensure researchers have advance notice of sonar exercises, seismic surveys and other activities.”

WWF urges all Contracting Governments to support, provide data to, and promote the expansion of the IWC Scientific Committee’s work on anthropogenic sound, to promote collaborative arrangements with the military and industry authorities as recommended by the Scientific Committee, and to promote additional work on this important subject in the Conservation Committee and the Commission.

ARCTIC ANTHROPOGENIC IMPACTS WORKSHOP

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. WWF is willing to commit resources, both technical and financial, to ensure the effectiveness of the workshop and positive impact from its outcomes. WWF has a large Global Arctic Programme, and is currently active in most Arctic countries, including Canada, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Russian Federation, Sweden, and the United States.

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, and declines in Arctic cetacean populations due to anthropogenic impacts such as oil and gas exploration would have severe implications for Inuit communities.

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 which can be immediately implemented by Arctic international and national management authorities.

SHIP STRIKES

Ship strikes are a growing threat to large whale populations across the globe, and can also cause significant damage to vessels and injury to passengers. WWF strongly supports the IWC Ship Strikes Working Group which is making significant progress in quantifying the problem and developing mitigation measures. WWF is working as part of the Working Group with Wallenius Wilhelmsen Logistics (WWL), a major shipping company, which is taking a leading role in the shipping industry by considering voluntary mitigation measures to reduce ship strikes. **WWF urges all IWC Contracting Governments to continue to engage with and support the Ship Strikes Working Group, and to develop ship strike mitigation regulations for cetaceans in their waters, particularly in waters which are important habitats for threatened cetacean species.**

The development of a mandatory code for ships operating in polar waters (the “Polar Code”) provides an important opportunity to minimize the risk of ship strikes in two of the most important habitats for cetaceans worldwide – the

³ For more information on the impact of ocean noise on cetaceans, visit <http://dontbeabuckethead.org/>



Arctic and the Antarctic. WWF, IFAW and Friends of the Earth have submitted a document to the International Maritime Organisation's (IMO) Marine Environment Protection Committee, urging IMO to consider and recommend suitable provisions for the polar code regarding vessel voyage planning and operations in order to avoid interactions, especially collisions, with cetaceans, or disruption of native subsistence hunting dependent on cetaceans. **WWF urges all IWC Contracting Governments to ensure that through their participation in the IMO, the Polar Code fully incorporates measures to reduce ship strikes with cetaceans.**

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), both in terms of bycatch and oil and gas development near its feeding grounds off Sakhalin Island in the Russian Far East.⁴ Possibly fewer than 130 animals remain.

WWF is extremely concerned about the impact of industrial activities off Sakhalin Island in the summer of 2010 on WGWs. The Western Gray Whale Advisory Panel expressed their concern as follows⁵: "It is particularly worrisome that three [seismic] surveys in 2010 occurred in or near three different parts of the population's feeding range near Sakhalin Island, including in the case of the Lebedenskoye survey an area used regularly by mother-calf pairs." For the Lebedenskoye survey WGWAP noted that "levels of noise received even in areas outside the Lebedenskoye licence area were above those known to cause behavioural disturbance to feeding gray whales" and that "it is likely that portions of the feeding area ... were exposed to levels that would be expected to cause hearing damage in gray whales." A report of WWF and partners⁶ developed from observations at the time of the Lebedenskoye survey noted that Rosneft (the company operating the Lebedenskoye survey) repeatedly violated its own mitigation measures, for example by conducting seismic testing at night when it is impossible to see (and avoid) WGWs, and by operating support vessels at full speed in the direct vicinity of WGWs, on several occasions causing repeated breaching and immediate avoidance reaction (ie WGW leaving the area at speed.)

The IWC Scientific Committee's report noted "the complication of multiple seismic surveys occurring in 2010" and further highlighted that 'at least three seismic surveys may take place off north eastern Sakhalin again in summer 2011.' Furthermore one company operational in the area have announced plans for a major new development - another offshore oil and gas platform, as documented in the 2011 IWC Scientific Committee report. Twenty NGOs have signed a Statement of Concern⁷ opposing the third platform, which could have a potentially devastating impact on the whales.

WWF congratulates the Government of Russia for imposing a regulation that will require developers in a new oil exploration block to conduct activities only from late November to late May, when the whales are away from their summer feeding grounds. However, the new regulation applies to only one section of the waters surrounding Sakhalin Island, while numerous companies have active projects in other areas close to the whales' feeding habitat.

WWF calls on the Government of Russia to expand its recent decision to only allow industrial activities when WGW are not present to all exploration blocks in the vicinity of the WGW feeding area, and to reject proposals from Sakhalin Energy for the construction of a new offshore platform. WWF calls on the other Contracting Governments, in particular those Governments which are range states of WGW, to support Russia in its conservation efforts for this species and to consider implementing similar time-space closures for cetacean populations in their own waters where oil and gas operations may occur.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

With no major proposal on the table for the Future of the IWC, IWC63 provides a significant opportunity to bring the IWC up to date with modern standards by improving its effectiveness and by strengthening its conservation agenda. WWF strongly urges all Contracting Governments to work together in this effort, and as the world's largest conservation organisation, WWF stands ready to offer its full support.

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

⁵ See the report of WGWAP's 9th meeting at www.iucn.org/wgwap/wgwap/meetings/wgwap_9/

⁶ See 'Preliminary results of the NGO monitoring of seismic geophysical explorations at the Lebedenskoye field, July-September 2010' http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/wgwap_9_doc_19_ngo_report_on_lebedenskoye_eng.pdf

⁷ See http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/wgwap_10_inf_1a_ngo_statement_of_concern_sakhalin_ii_march_2011.pdf