



PRESS BRIEFING FOR IWC60

Santiago, Chile will host the 60th annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) between **23 June and 27 June 2008**.

The meeting is likely to be of great importance for whale conservation as the Commission remains deeply divided over commercial whaling. Last year, with conservation-minded countries re-gaining a majority of votes within the IWC, the moratorium on commercial whaling remained intact. However, whaling countries, Japan in particular, have continued to pressure the IWC into making concessions by increasing their self-allocated hunts, threatening to kill new species, and resuming trade in whale meat.

Key issues:

- The battle for commercial whaling
- Proposal to hunt humpback whales
- The future of the IWC
- Iceland and Norway's whale meat export to Japan

The battle for commercial whaling

Defying world opinion and the pleas of the IWC, Japan ignores the moratorium and conducts large-scale commercial whaling under the thin disguise of scientific research. It regularly increases its self-allocated whaling quotas; adding new and highly controversial species to its hunts in recent years and repeatedly threatening to leave the IWC if it doesn't get what it wants. In this way, and by recruiting developing nations to join the IWC and vote in its favour, Japan puts increasing pressure on governments to lift the ban on commercial whaling.

Several attempts have been made by conciliatory governments over the last 15 years to break Japan's stranglehold over the IWC; offering something they believe it wants - legal and political legitimacy for its whaling - in return for phasing out its massive scientific hunts.

Another deal along these lines appears to be in the offing and will be a major focus for delegates outside of the main meeting.

It is likely that such a deal would offer Japan quotas in its coastal waters, approval for which it has long sought from the IWC, in return for phasing out its scientific hunts. At this year's meeting, Japan will yet again propose its annual "interim relief allocation" of minke whales each year for the next 5 years for what it claims would be 'local consumption' by four coastal whaling communities. The specific proposal is likely to be unsuccessful, but it appears to be the basis of discussion amongst governments who are willing to allow Japan to target minke whales in its coastal waters again; bringing great risks for future whale conservation. WDCS has the following concerns:

- Enforcement

Despite the massive decline of its market for whale meat since the 1990s, leading to huge industry debts, Japan is targeting more and more whales. It does not look like a nation ready to accept small quotas under strict international regulation. Not without access to the loopholes that it currently relies upon for its scientific hunts. Japan insists that because of the way scientific whaling is enshrined in the IWC's treaty, it supersedes anything else the Commission might agree, including new quotas. It certainly prevails over any 'gentleman's agreement' for a phase-out of scientific whaling; Japan could simply change its mind later.

- Expansion of whaling by other nations

Creating a new category of whaling for Japan's coastal hunts could open up 'coastal whaling' for other countries and lead to a resumption of international trade. At least one non whaling nation (South Korea) has expressed an interest in a coastal whaling quota, and other countries currently whaling may seek to benefit from the deal too.

- Impact on vulnerable coastal whale populations

Whales living in coastal waters are biologically the most vulnerable to habitat degradation and both chemical and noise pollution.

- Norway and Iceland

From what we understand of the deal proposed, nothing is being proposed to bring Norway and Iceland's commercial hunts under international control.

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Proposal to hunt humpback whales

At this year's IWC meeting, Denmark will propose a new quota for the hunting of humpback whales by Greenland. If successful, humpback whales will be killed by Greenlandic whalers for first time since the commercial whaling ban came into force in 1986.

Greenland's whaling quotas are now allocated by the IWC under the category of Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling (ASW), which allows certain indigenous peoples to hunt otherwise protected whales to satisfy longstanding cultural and subsistence needs.

Greenland seeks 730 tonnes of whale meat annually. To meet this, the IWC awards an ASW quota, expanded last year, of 19 fin whales, 212 minke whales and two bowheads (quota not yet operational). However, Greenland argues that a further quota of humpback whales is required in order to meet the needs of its growing human population. This is despite the fact that hunters have not met their available quota in recent years; whale meat is widely distributed across Greenland in supermarkets; and hunters even appear to profit from selling by-products such as carved bones as souvenirs to tourists.

At last year's meeting, the IWC's Scientific Committee was unable to advise on Greenland's request for 10 humpback whales due to considerable uncertainty over the surprisingly large abundance estimates it submitted. Greenland withdrew the request, but Denmark (who represents Greenland at the IWC) is expected to submit new evidence this year to back up the request.

WDCS opposes this request for an increased quota. Even if scientists are confident that the quota requested could be sustainable, we believe that Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling quotas should, as the name indicates, and the IWC intended, only be awarded to meet the subsistence and cultural needs of remote, indigenous whaling communities; not to provide cheap food or decorative items through commercial distribution channels to a wider society. We also have grave concerns about the management of Greenland's whaling and the humaneness of the methods used.

The Future of the IWC

Crucially, this year's meeting will focus on the future of the IWC. Many countries wish to see conservation adopted as the primary focus of the IWC in order to address threatened and endangered populations of whales and dolphins globally.

With the recent extinction of the Baiji river dolphin and the survival of many other whale and dolphin species hanging in the balance, it is essential that the IWC urgently addresses their recovery.

Threats such as hunting, habitat loss, chemical and noise pollution, climate change, entanglement in fishing nets, ship strikes and human disturbance are all affecting whale and dolphin populations around the globe. Efforts have so far failed to address the impact of these threats effectively. Many whale population estimates are inaccurate due to the incredible difficulty of gathering data on far ranging, deep diving animals.

WDCS, along with other conservation groups, and several governments, is calling on the IWC to focus on reversing the current trend in diminishing population numbers and to protect further populations from becoming at risk.

International Trade

Norway, Japan and Iceland all hold reservations exempting them from the ban on international commercial trade in whales imposed by CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. In late May 2008, Iceland used its reservation to export 60 tonnes of fin whale meat to Japan, and Norway, apparently in the same shipment, sent five tonnes of minke whale meat. WDCS believes that this export defies the spirit of the CITES trade ban and makes a mockery of efforts to negotiate a settlement with the whaling nations. It proves that they cannot be trusted.

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The Cruelty of Whaling

Due to the inherent difficulties under which whaling takes place, which involves aiming weapons at a moving target on a moving sea from a moving platform, WDCS believes that whaling can never be guaranteed to be humane and that commercial whaling should cease on welfare grounds alone.

Whales that are killed for commercial purposes should be afforded the same level of legislative welfare protection as other animals that are killed for commercial purposes. However, this is not the case and WDCS argues that it is not possible to ensure a humane death for hunted whales, since they can not be humanely secured and stunned before slaughter, or guaranteed an instantaneous death.

Whales that are struck and wounded by a projectile during hunting (usually a harpoon or bullet) are known as 'Struck and Lost'. 'Struck and Lost' whales are an unacceptable aspect of all whale and dolphin hunts. These animals may escape the initial strike, but will have an unknown fate and may suffer for many days afterwards. WDCS is relieved that the IWC, after years of our urging, finally established all ASW quotas as strike limits, not landing limits; giving hunters a greater incentive to land every whale that they strike.

Japan and the other whaling nations have yet to produce comprehensive data sets for 'Times to Death' and 'Instantaneous Death Rates' allowing for independent analysis of these data. Japan has never released any data at all on the two largest species it kills - sperm whales and fin whales. This information is crucial in assessing the length of time a whale may suffer before finally dying.

Species at risk

Despite the moratorium on commercial whaling, a number of whale populations have failed to recover to anywhere near their former numbers and are now in critical danger of extinction. The following critically endangered whale populations continue to be threatened by avoidable human activities.

The North Atlantic right whale has not been hunted commercially for over 70 years. The remaining animals make up what is probably the only potentially viable population of this species left in the Northern Hemisphere, even though it numbers no more than approximately 400 animals. The IWC's Scientific Committee has repeatedly warned that "it

is a matter of absolute urgency that every effort be made to reduce anthropogenic mortality in this population to zero", and that no delay is justified in implementing management actions to reduce mortality.

However, significant numbers of North Atlantic right whales continue to die or become seriously injured as a result of entanglement in fishing gear and vessel strikes (including by US Navy vessels). Out of population of less than 400, at least 32 right whales died, were injured by ship strikes, or were documented entangled in fishing gear between January 2004 and April 2008.

The USA, through whose waters these vessels were transiting, is being urged, including by litigation, to adopt protective measures for the North Atlantic right whale, such as setting vessel speed limits in right whale habitats or known concentrations of right whales. Fixed fishing gear fisheries, along most of the east coast of the USA, are in the process of changing from floating to sinking groundline to reduce the risk of entanglement.

WDCS is working in collaboration with a number of NGOs to pressure the release of a vessel speed rule from the US Government's Office of Management and Budget and we are part of the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team which works to reduce the threat of entanglement.

North West Pacific Gray Whale

The IWC's Scientific Committee has repeatedly warned that the western gray whale population, which numbers about 100 individuals, is in serious trouble and that it is a matter of absolute urgency that every effort is made to reduce anthropogenic mortality (including direct catches) and disturbance to zero to save it from extinction. Four western gray whales are known to have been killed as bycatch in the last three years. WDCS has urged IWC member countries to take immediate actions to end bycatch deaths in this population.

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Background information

In 1982, after centuries of over-exploitation, many whale populations were close to extinction and the International Whaling Commission (a body formed under a 1946 treaty to regulate whaling and conserve whales) agreed to implement a ban, 'the moratorium', on commercial whaling.

The moratorium came into effect in 1986 and has, for the most part, been a successful conservation measure: Commercial whaling declined and some (although by no means all) whale populations are slowly recovering. Despite the ban, however, Japan, Iceland and Norway exploit loopholes in the text of the IWC's founding treaty and kill hundreds of whales each year for commercial purposes. In addition, the IWC permits 'aborigines', whose cultural and nutritional need for whales and whaling it recognises, to hunt some species "exclusively for local consumption".

Japan began whaling on a commercial scale in the 1940's, after WWII when protein was in short supply. Following the implementation of the IWC's ban on commercial whaling in 1986, Japan commenced a programme of whaling for what is termed 'scientific research' under a provision in the treaty. Now expanded to two research programmes, Japan currently kills 10 sperm, 100 sei, 50 Bryde's and 120 minke whales in the North Pacific (60 of which are killed by Small Type Coastal Whalers) and up to 935 minkes and 10 fin whales in an area of Antarctica designated a whale sanctuary by the IWC in 1994. A total of 1225 whales a year. The fin whale hunt was to expand to 50 animals in 2007/8 (but none were taken) and a hunt of 50 humpback whales was scheduled to begin. However, this hunt was postponed. WDCS believes the purpose of including humpbacks in the research programme was to use the animals as a 'bargaining tool' to get what they want – recognition for a new category of whaling.

Japan's whaling fleet set sail on Sunday 18th November 2007 for the 2007/08 Antarctic hunt. The hunt ended in April 2008 having killed a total of 551 minke whales, fewer than its originally intended quota of 935. Japan blamed the shortfall on interference with its fleet by conservation groups.

Japan has been bound by the ban on commercial whaling since 1988 when it rescinded its original legal 'objection' to the moratorium. However, the IWC allows whales to be killed under 'special

permits' for scientific research, issued by member governments of the IWC. To avoid wastage, the IWC also allows for the processing and sale of the products of whales killed during scientific hunts. This allowance by the IWC was never intended to allow for the large scale lethal research and commercial use of the 'by-products', but several countries have used it to top up their quotas. For example, Japan killed a total of 840 whales for scientific research between 1954 and 1986. The results of the so called 'scientific research' led by Japan are rarely published or submitted to peer review.

Use of the scientific whaling loophole clearly defies the spirit of the moratorium and the will of the IWC. The Commission has adopted over 40 resolutions denying the validity and necessity of scientific whaling programmes and calling on Japan (and Iceland) to stop killing whales in this way. The resolutions are however non binding and the whaling nations have chosen to simply ignore them.

Japan also kills tens of thousands of small whales and dolphins annually (including a highly unsustainable hunt of 17,000 Dall's porpoises) for its domestic market, despite concerns about the impact of the hunts on these populations, the cruel methods used, and the high levels of pollutants found in these species. These hunts are not regulated by the IWC.

Japan currently sells thousands of tons of edible whale meat annually from both the 'scientific' hunts and the hunts of small cetaceans and 'by-catch', but there is not demand for the full extent of the research programme and vast quantities of whale products languish in freezers. The Japanese public views whale meat as an expensive luxury item and not an everyday food, even as government drops the price to stimulate demand, and encourages consumers to try new products.

Norway carries out the world's largest commercial whale hunt which last year included the highest coastal catch allowance since the country's return to commercial whaling 14 years ago.

Norway has continued to kill minke whales in the North Atlantic since 1993 through a legal 'Objection' lodged against the moratorium in 1982. The 'objection' serves to exempt Norway from the ban, although it is against the spirit of the moratorium. Norway has increased its self-allocated quota at an alarming rate in recent years, from 670 in 2004 to

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796 in 2005. For the last three years Norway has awarded itself massive quotas of 1,052 minke whales.

The 2007 & 2008 quotas allowed for more whales to be killed in easier to reach coastal areas, and dropped the number of whales targeted in the offshore and remote Jan Mayan territory.

In the last ten years Norwegian whalers have fulfilled their quota only once, in 2001, when the quota was much lower at 546 minke whales.

Norway's continued commercial whaling costs the Government hundreds of thousands of pounds in subsidies including fuel tax exemption and the disposal, storage and processing of whale blubber, for which there is no domestic market.

Despite Government support and subsidies, the demand for whale meat continues to fall, and Norwegian whalers continue to fail to meet their own whaling quotas. With fewer than 600 minke whales killed in both the 2006 and 2007 hunts, there is no evidence to suggest there is a market for meat from over 1000 animals, unless Norway can resume international trade.

Norwegian whale hunts cause immense and unnecessary suffering for the commercial production of meat. Data from its own hunts has shown that one in five whales do not die instantaneously. Whales that are struck by the harpoon, lost and then recovered can take up to an hour to die. In contrast to the strict regulations for commercial meat production in Norwegian slaughterhouses, whales are not stunned or humanely secured before they are killed. Instead, when the harpoon is unsuccessful, a rifle is often used to finally kill the whale.

Iceland stopped commercial whaling in 1986 having arguably agreed to the moratorium by not taking an objection against the decision like Norway and Japan (originally) did. They did, however, continue to pursue scientific whaling until 1989.

In 1992 Iceland left the IWC and then re-joined in 2002 with a legally disputed reservation against the moratorium. Some countries still do not recognize Iceland's membership of the IWC. Since 2003, Iceland have continued to pursue 'scientific whaling', killing 36 minke whales in 2003, 25 in 2004, 39 in 2005 and 60 in 2006. Iceland ended its scientific programme having killed a total of 200 minke whales

for research by the end of the 2007 season. Iceland has not reported any data from its scientific hunts to the IWC.

In 2006, Iceland resumed commercial whaling under its reservation to the moratorium, and killed a total of 7 out of 9 fin whales and 1 of 30 minke whales in its self-allocated quota, despite an extension to the whaling season.

The domestic market for whale meat in Iceland is very low and historically much of the meat from Iceland's whaling industry has been exported to Japan. Minke whale meat has sold poorly in Iceland since whaling resumed in 2003, and the resumption of a commercial hunt in 2006 has led to more difficulties in domestic sales of whale meat. The Icelandic press reported early in 2007 that 179 tonnes of 'slaughter waste' representing about half of the fin whales killed in the commercial hunt had been dumped in landfills.

In August, 2007 Minister of Fisheries Einar K. Gudfinnsson announced that he would not issue whaling quotas, as there was no market demand for Icelandic whale products.

Given the difficulties in selling whale meat domestically, Iceland has repeatedly stated its interest in re-opening trade in whale products. Both the minke and fin whalers have expressed an interest in exporting meat to Japan.

In 2008, Iceland's Fisheries Minister issued a quota of 40 minke whales for the commercial hunt, and hunting began in May.

WDCS has an expert team attending the 60th meeting of the International Whaling Commission who will be available for comment as the week progresses. To speak with one of our team, please contact the UK WDCS Press Office during office hours 9am – 5pm on 01249 449 534, 24 hour press mobile 07834 498277 or email press@wdcs.org.

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