

Opening Statement from Humane Society International on the occasion of the Virtual Special Meeting of the International Whaling Commission, 8th-10th September 2021.



**HUMANE SOCIETY
INTERNATIONAL**

Humane Society International, is pleased to be represented at this Virtual Special Meeting of the International Whaling Commission. We are sorry that again we cannot meet in person, and we look forward to a time when this will be possible. Nonetheless, we wish all delegates well in their important deliberations over the next three days and, in particular, in relation to the ongoing efforts to ensure that the IWC's conservation and welfare work continues.

The importance of the IWC's work in addressing the profound threats to many cetacean populations and species should not be underestimated and we call on all member governments to make every effort to support this work. The perilous situation for many cetaceans was underlined almost exactly a year ago when more than 350 scientists and experts from around the world issued a statement of concern about cetacean conservation, highlighting the high number of species and populations that have concerning conservation status. This statement can be viewed on the website of the University of Pretoria here: <https://www.mammalresearchinstitute.science/whale-unit>

These clearly stated concerns reflect a growing appreciation that cetaceans are being impacted by our ever-expanding industrial activities at sea, including the noise coming from shipping and associated ship strikes and, of course, the impacts of fishing activities. Nor are cetaceans immune from the global-level changes we are causing in their environment, as already evidenced by some shifts in their populations and those of their prey. The IWC's role in terms of better understanding these key issues and providing recommendations about how to address and mitigate them has evolved into one of great importance with a number of associated work streams, including Conservation Management Plans and Task Teams.

Clearly, the IWC began its life as an organisation focused on the management of commercial whaling – an activity that devastated populations and proved to be unmanageable and something that should never be approved again. But now, as we emerge from the devastating pandemic that pulled into sharp focus the interconnectedness between people, planet and animals, and as world leaders commit to applying the '[One Health](#)' approach to address global challenges, it is clearer than ever that the IWC's role now and in the future must be protecting cetaceans, who act as sentinels for the health of our global oceans. We therefore call on all parties to the convention to work together to facilitate this endeavour in any ways that they can.

These are challenging times for us all and the IWC's finances must be regularised and agreed. To fail in this would be failing the cetaceans. Alongside our NGO friends, HSI is ready to offer support in trying to find new income streams and new ways forward.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank the IWC secretariat for their stalwart endeavours and also thanks all the officers and members of the IWC's key work streams covering science, conservation, finance, communications, and IT. We very much appreciate that many give their time voluntarily to support the work of the Commission and that these 'in-kind' contributions are very valuable and allow the IWC to do much more than it otherwise would.