



## **Josh Wilson MP**

### **OPENING STATEMENT**

### **68<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION**

**17 October 2022**

***Portorož, Slovenia***

In Australia, we begin every formal event with acknowledgement of the Traditional Owners of the land or sea on which we meet. Today I acknowledge all First Nations peoples globally, pay respects to their elders, and acknowledge the significant and enduring role played by Indigenous people everywhere in managing our precious environment and biodiversity.

I am pleased to represent the Australian Government at this 68th meeting of the International Whaling Commission, on behalf of the Minister for the Environment and Water, the Hon Tanya Plibersek.

I would like to thank the Government of Slovenia for generously hosting this Commission meeting, and acknowledge the hard work of Mr Bibič, who has ably guided the Commission through unprecedented challenges over the past four years as Chair.

I would also like to thank the entire team that comprises the IWC Secretariat for their commitment to providing the highest standard of support to Contracting Governments. Without their hard work and dedication this important meeting would not be possible.

As a Parliamentary representative let me acknowledge and thank the public servants, the foreign affairs and scientific experts who undertake this vital multilateral work in the cause of sustainable resource management and biodiversity protection.

Last year, the Commission celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary – a monumental achievement and a timely opportunity for us to reflect on the breadth and importance of the work undertaken by the Commission, on both the conservation of cetaceans and the management of whaling.

Over the past 75 years the Commission, as the global authority for the conservation and management of whales, has evolved to keep pace with our changing world. This has included advances in scientific knowledge and technology, and major shifts in societal values towards greater environmental protection and animal welfare.

Australia is proud to be a member of an organisation with a critical range of work, from supporting the traditional hunting of whales by First Nations communities to allow for the

sustainable continuation of cultural and subsistence needs, to being at the forefront of non-lethal research into the ecology and conservation of cetaceans.

At this time of year in Australia, humpback whales are migrating south along our west and east coasts towards the Southern Ocean and the important feeding grounds of the IWC's Southern Ocean Sanctuary.

This annual migration supports a thriving whale watching industry in our coastal communities that benefits local economies and provides joy and a kind of environmental communion for visitors from all over the world. I am pleased to see this industry and the opportunities it presents being embraced by many countries and supported by the IWC's Conservation Committee.

The Australian Government recognises the essential role that whales play in healthy and productive ocean ecosystems, and considers it critical that modern threats to cetaceans are understood and addressed at local, regional, and global scales. We are confident this can be done effectively by the IWC to the benefit of all members, while strongly maintaining its support of First Nations whalers.

Over the course of this meeting the Commission will consider a set of important issues in order to further strengthen its governance arrangements and ensure the balance of views of contracting parties continue to be effectively represented in decision making, including by ensuring those worst affected by the pandemic can fully participate in the meeting.

The Commission will also consider critical budget reforms, led by Australia, to ensure the future financial stability of this important organisation. While there is no easy answer to addressing the current financial situation, I am confident we can reach an outcome that supports the ongoing work of the Commission.

I urge all Contracting Governments to engage constructively in this decision making, as balancing the budget is a crucial first step and foundation for the discussion, debate, and action towards delivering the Commission's priorities in future.

The Australian Government is committed to continuing its leadership in the global protection and management of whales. That is why I am pleased to announce that Australia will nominate as Vice Chair of Commission for the next biennium.

Australia has been heavily involved in the drafting and cooperative development of proposals on the agenda at this meeting, and for us the work does not stop here. We are committed to supporting the smooth implementation of budget decisions and the organisational change associated with implementing recommendations of the Governance Review (via the Working Group on Operational Effectiveness proposals).

We hope to share and facilitate the critical work of the IWC through the responsibility of the Vice Chair position and thank Contracting States for their consideration and support this week. We also look forward to working with the Chair to oversee and support the renewal process of Aboriginal subsistence whaling quotas in 2024.

Finally, can I just make what is perhaps an obvious point, especially at this gathering, and that is to say that the world needs more cooperative and collaborative efforts like the IWC. We need more efforts that operate with purpose and goodwill in the shared interests of all people and all life on our planet.

We need more efforts that put a high value on consensus, and that put a high value on reaching agreement and making positive change through proper democratic process where perfect consensus cannot be reached.

Thank you.