

Opening statement for IWC68 – United Kingdom

The United Kingdom wishes to express our sincere gratitude to the Government of Slovenia for its wonderful hospitality once again in hosting this 68th Meeting of the International Whaling Commission, and for the very warm welcome we have all received in Portorož. We would also like to extend our gratitude to the Chair of the Commission who generously allowed us to extend his term and steered the Commission through the challenging years presented by the pandemic.

In 2021, the IWC celebrated its 75th anniversary. The United Kingdom is proud to have supported the IWC over the last 75 years, both to advance the conservation and welfare of all cetaceans globally and, where whaling is conducted to meet aboriginal subsistence needs, ensuring it is sustainable, well-regulated, and done to the highest welfare standards. The United Kingdom is proud to be involved in several IWC groups, where we are making a real difference in supporting the IWC's efforts to understand and mitigate the many and growing threats that cetaceans face today.

The moratorium on commercial whaling has provided critical protection for the great whales including supporting the recovery of critically depleted populations. As reaffirmed in the Florianopolis Declaration at IWC67, the United Kingdom strongly supports upholding the moratorium on commercial whaling and was proud to celebrate the 40th anniversary of its agreement in July 2022.

We strongly encourage all countries that conduct commercial whaling to bring their whaling operations to an end and move towards responsible tourism, such as whale watching, to allow cetaceans to maximise their ecological contributions to ecosystem functioning.

Cetaceans are facing significant challenges in a rapidly changing world and the United Kingdom is strongly supportive of the IWC's work to understand and address threats to cetaceans, through the work of its Scientific and Conservation Committees. We are extremely grateful to those who have been working hard to develop effective workstreams including on chemical and noise pollution, ship strikes, bycatch, and climate change. The creation of a **South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary** would significantly contribute to improving the protection and status of whales globally. We urge all Contracting Governments to come together to adopt a well presented and scientifically sound proposal that will deliver tangible benefits to whales. We also strongly encourage Contracting Governments to support the proposed **Resolution on Marine Plastic Pollution** which highlights the significant threat of marine plastic pollution to cetaceans and provides for the IWC to engage in the UN Environment Assembly process to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution. The United Kingdom is delighted to co-sponsor this proposed Resolution.

The United Kingdom has already committed to goals on hunger and food security in various appropriate international instruments. Whilst we have significant concerns about the proposal for IWC to adopt a **Resolution on Food Security**, we stand ready to engage in discussion on these matters.

The proposed **Resolution on Implementation of a conservation and management program for whale stocks towards the lifting of the moratorium and the orderly development of the whaling industry** seeks to establish a working group to restart negotiations to agree monitoring, control and

surveillance processes to enable commercial whaling to take place. The United Kingdom is strongly opposed to commercial whaling. We do, however, recognise the diverse range of views among Contracting Governments and consider it important to engage in an open and constructive dialogue on all whaling matters. At this time, the United Kingdom has significant concerns about this proposed Resolution given that it does not address how to resolve the large number of complex issues that stalled previous negotiations on the Revised Management Scheme.

The United Kingdom has long been involved in championing the welfare of cetaceans, both in the context of hunting and other anthropogenic threats. We value the longstanding work and expertise of the Working Group on Whale Killing Methods and Welfare Issues. We have been proud to lead initiatives on welfare and are particularly pleased to see the progress made to develop a welfare assessment tool for cetaceans. We continue to encourage countries conducting commercial whaling to submit welfare data to the IWC.

We strongly encourage Contracting Governments to engage in and support the proposals put forward by the Working Group on Operational Effectiveness, including agreeing to the recommendations in the **Budgetary Reform Strategy**, the **Governance Reform Proposals** and on **Strategic Principles**. This work is the culmination of four years of extensive consultation with Contracting Governments and observers. The governance reform proposals will improve the institutional and governance arrangements of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies, taking into account the recommendations from the Report of the panel of Independent Reviewers. The United Kingdom believes that the new proposed governance structure, comprising of four Committees, reorganises the Commission to better reflect balance and provides much-needed recognition of the important conservation work carried out by the IWC.

The United Kingdom fully appreciates the significant fiscal challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic on Contracting Governments, especially developing countries. We welcome the range of options on the table which explore potential changes to the link between financial status and **voting rights**. Recognising the exceptional circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic, the United Kingdom supports the temporary reinstatement of voting rights at IWC68 for Contracting Governments who did not meet their annual payments for 2020, 2021 and/or 2022.

We note with extreme concern the critical **financial situation** in which the IWC currently finds itself. The United Kingdom fully recognises the significant budgetary challenges currently facing many countries, but we would strongly encourage Contracting Governments to carefully consider the long-term implications of the budget decisions to be made at this meeting. It is critical to the future of the IWC that we reach agreement on a balanced budget. The United Kingdom is committed to minimising any potential spending cuts that would significantly impact the IWC's important work.

We look forward to working actively and constructively with the proponents of all proposals to ensure that this 68th meeting is successful and produces tangible results to further the conservation and management of cetaceans.