

**New Zealand**  
**Opening Statement**  
**68<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION**  
17-21 October 2022  
Portorož, Slovenia

**THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION IS NEEDED NOW MORE THAN EVER**

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa – our greetings to all that gather here.

The Government of New Zealand thanks the Government of Slovenia for hosting the 68<sup>th</sup> meeting of the International Whaling Commission.

We also thank the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Commission's committees and working groups for their leadership over the intersessional period, and the Bureau and Secretariat for their on-going work.

We also acknowledge the effort and support from all of us – the member states, observers and civil society participants – to ensure this body successfully carries out its responsibility for the conservation and management of cetaceans.

This Commission meeting is particularly significant as the first in-person meeting in four years, and one year since the 75th anniversary of the signing of the Convention.

**Great Successes but Challenges Remain**

The Convention was one of the first modern international environmental agreements to recognise that international cooperation was necessary to protect our shared environment from exploitation.

The strength of the Commission lies in the fact that this foundation principle has remained constant as the organisation has evolved. Within the framework of the 1946 Convention, the Commission has responded to developments in global science, understanding, and opinion.

New Zealand regards the moratorium on commercial whaling, in place for 35 years, as one of the most progressive, forward-looking conservation measures of its time to protect great whales from almost certain extinction.

Some populations are recovering. Others remain threatened or vulnerable. Worryingly, cetaceans across the world face a plethora of other anthropogenic threats, including pollution; disease; entanglement; fisheries bycatch; ship strikes; habitat degradation and climate change.

Now, more than ever, the work of the Commission is needed. Back in 1946, the international community had limited understanding of the contribution that whale and dolphin populations made to healthy oceans. We still have much to learn, but through the

Scientific Committee we are deepening our knowledge of the contribution made by cetaceans to productive ocean ecosystems.

In this regard, New Zealand welcomes the proposal for the IWC to engage in international efforts to address plastic pollution, to mitigate impacts on cetaceans.

New Zealand is also a long-standing supporter of the proposal for a South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary. We commend the co-sponsors for their efforts in developing this comprehensive proposal, and recall the Scientific Committee's positive review of the Sanctuary's management plan. We hope to see this Sanctuary become a reality at IWC68.

New Zealand remains opposed to commercial whaling. We hold concerns about resolutions which would create the conditions to resume commercial whaling.

#### *Our Priorities for the Future*

New Zealand is a strong supporter of the Conservation Committee. We consider its work is vital to the long term conservation and management of cetaceans.

The Bycatch Mitigation Initiative, the Strandings Initiative and ongoing Disentanglement work demonstrate that the Commission is able to use its extensive technical expertise to support international conservation efforts.

New Zealand encourages all members to participate in the Conservation Committee, including its capacity-building activities. We believe the Committee's work is relevant to all fishing and coastal states with cetacean populations. We hope that more members can benefit from the expertise of the Conservation Committee.

New Zealand welcomes the IWC's ambitious scientific and conservation work programmes. We support continued funding of the Bycatch and Strandings Coordinators to advance these important areas of work. We also encourage work to progress the implementation funding for a Disentanglement Coordinator.

In the intersessional period, New Zealand provided support for the IWC Whale Watching Handbook. This is a welcome and practical resource for operators as eco-tourism sectors recover from the global COVID-19 pandemic.

#### *Engagement in our Pacific Neighbourhood*

New Zealand welcomes the initiatives being taken by the Secretariat of the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), of which New Zealand is a member, to address the many threats to Pacific whale and dolphin populations and their habitats.

In June this year, SPREP released its Pacific Islands Regional Marine Species Programme 2022–2026, which includes an updated Whale and Dolphin Action Plan for the region. New Zealand supported this work through the secondment of a Department of

Conservation official. We look forward to the adoption of the new Action Plan at the 31st SPREP meeting in 2023.

During the intersessional period, New Zealand was also pleased to recognise the inaugural meeting between the Secretariats of the IWC and SPREP, part of the continuing effort of the IWC to cooperate with other organisations.

*Modernising Our Ways of Working*

The Commission faces challenges of its own. As well as disrupting meeting schedules, the exceptional effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic have impacted the budgetary capacity of both the Commission and its Members.

New Zealand believes it is time to consider broader budgetary and governance reforms to ensure the IWC is fit for purpose in a post-pandemic and climate challenged world.

New Zealand thanks the Working Group on Operational Effectiveness for their efforts throughout the Commission's Governance Review process. We look forward to progressing these initiatives at IWC68. New Zealand will strive for consensus outcomes to continue to improve the Commission's institutional and governance arrangements and balance the budget.

The Commission continues to evolve, to reflect the demands of the present. Given the increasing threats to cetaceans across the globe, it is important that it continues to do so.

New Zealand is committed to engaging constructively with all members of the IWC. We look forward to a positive and productive meeting.

Thank you.