

EIA opening statement to the 68th Meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC68)

October 2022

Representatives of the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) are pleased to attend IWC68 in Portoroz. We sincerely thank the Chair Andrej Bibič for his work over the last four years and wish him well as he steps down at the end of IWC68. We also thank Executive Secretary Rebecca Lent, Members of the Bureau and the Secretariat Staff Members for organising this important meeting. We look forward to a successful meeting that will contribute to improving the conservation status of cetaceans around the world.

EIA has participated as an IWC Registered Observer in the work of the IWC since 1986 - the year the international moratorium on commercial whaling was implemented. Over that time the IWC has become a global leader for the conservation of cetaceans and their marine habitats, working in collaboration with an ever-increasing number of other intergovernmental organisations.

We congratulate the IWC on the 40th Anniversary of the adoption of the moratorium in 1982 – one of the world's most important conservation and welfare measures that saved several great whale populations and species from extinction.

The health of the ocean continues to deteriorate as a result of human activities. In 1946, industrial commercial whaling was the greatest threat to great whales. The moratorium on commercial whaling has enabled many populations of great whales to begin their slow recovery. But today, all cetacean species are threatened by a complex cocktail of human impacts, including *inter alia* climate change, chemical, noise and plastic pollution, prey depletion and bycatch.

During this time, the IWC has been developing its unique expertise in understanding cetacean conservation and welfare issues, in tackling threats to cetaceans and their marine ecosystems. It is increasing its knowledge of the importance of the role cetaceans play in marine ecosystems and their resulting benefit to the global economy.

Against the backdrop of the global pandemic, the need for effective multilateral environmentalism and international cooperation has never been so clear. At this important time, Contracting Governments and Observers must work together to ensure the IWC has the capacity and resources to increase its vital conservation and welfare work to effectively protect cetaceans and the ocean environment for generations to come.

We commend document IWC/68/14/01/REV1 Cooperation with other Organisations that lays out the breadth of international cooperation being undertaken by the IWC and urge the IWC to continue to expand such efforts. This document demonstrates that the Commission is fulfilling its Convention obligation to manage and conserve cetacean populations.

The IWC's Budget Crisis

To build the strength and expertise of the IWC it is imperative that Contracting Governments effectively address the budget crisis to enable continuation of the IWC's vital work. We commend the Budgetary Sub-Committee's (BSC) endeavours to tackle the IWC's financial crisis and the leadership work it has contributed to the reform process. As noted by the BSC, adopting deficit budgets is not sustainable. The Commission's governance reform process provides a

good opportunity to undertake a more holistic review of the Commission's financial procedures. We urge Contracting Governments adopt a budget that ensures the long-term future of the Commission and its work.

Working Group on Operational Effectiveness (WGOE)

EIA is pleased to participate as a member of the WGOE and we commend its ongoing work. We thank all WGOE participants for their hard work and particularly the UK and USA as its Co-Chairs and Australia for its leadership on the budgetary reform process.

As concluded by the independent review panel and IWC Contracting Governments, it is essential that the IWC adopts strategic and transparent reforms that will introduce international best practice, strengthen its vital work and provide budgetary security in the long term.

We urge Contracting Governments to support the budget reform proposals and the proposals that would strengthen the IWC's structure and operations. We do not believe there is sufficient clarity over the establishment of a Management Committee and its role to support this element. We are also concerned at proposals to disband the Whale Killing Methods Working Group and distribute cetacean welfare across multiple committees. The IWC is a world leader on addressing both hunting and non-hunting welfare threats to cetaceans and a bespoke welfare committee is essential to developing this internationally important work for the benefit of cetaceans.

Commercial whaling

EIA remains deeply concerned about the ongoing commercial whaling activities of Iceland, Norway and Japan, in defiance of the moratorium. In addition, these three countries are trading in whale products in defiance of the CITES¹ Appendix I listings for great whales. Commercial whaling flies in the face of international environmental agreements and serves no economic or nutritional purpose. We urge IWC Contracting Governments to strongly reaffirm the continuation of the moratorium and reject the Resolution proposed by Antigua and Barbuda that seeks to establish a Special Working Group to resume negotiations on the implementation of the RMP and the RMS with a view to lifting the moratorium and developing the whaling industry.

Marine Plastic Pollution

The IWC recognised the potential significance of marine debris impacts on cetaceans almost two decades ago and has since undertaken a number of actions to understand, manage and mitigate the impact of marine debris, increasingly focused on plastics.

The IWC has a [critical role](#) to play in tackling the impacts of plastic on the world's whales, dolphins and porpoises and we strongly support the EUs draft Resolution on this issue. Adoption of this Resolution will encourage the development and support of a comprehensive work programme under the IWC, with clear and appropriately supported roles for the IWC Secretariat and the various committees and working groups.

By setting out a clear plan for engagement in the broader global context on plastic pollution, including support for and engaging as a stakeholder within discussions on a new global agreement on plastic pollution, the IWC can significantly and efficiently contribute to the

¹ Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

effectiveness of global efforts to reduce plastic pollution, including its impact on the conservation of cetaceans.

Directed hunts

The Scientific Committee has raised clear concerns about directed hunts, including those of Greenland – with the takes of Killer whale in east and west Greenland, harbour porpoise in west Greenland and particularly regarding the imminent risk of extirpation of narwhal in southeast Greenland. The Scientific Committee reiterated previous advice from NAMMCO to set zero quotas, recognising the gravity of the situation. EIA strongly urges the IWC to expand its work to address the impact of direct hunts on small cetaceans.

Vaquita

We share the Scientific Committees concern for the plight of the critically endangered vaquita, and support its recommendations, including to revise the Enforcement Plan and to strengthen actions to effectively cease the manufacture, sale, transport and use of gillnets in the Upper Gulf of California.

As we approach CITES COP19 in Panama in November 2022, where the CITES Secretariat report documents the failure of the Mexican government to stop illegal fishing in the Zero Tolerance Area to protect totoaba and vaquita, we urge IWC Contracting Governments to bilaterally reach out to Mexico to offer assistance, financial and otherwise, to help save the vaquita from extinction.

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