



Opening Statement of the EU Member States Party to the ICRW

Plenary Agenda item 1.2

At this meeting, the Czech Republic will be speaking on behalf of the EU and its Member States¹. We wish to express our gratitude to the Government of Slovenia for its hospitality in hosting this 68th Meeting of the International Whaling Commission and for the very warm welcome we have all received in Portorož.

The Covid-19 pandemic forced the Commission to postpone its in-person biennial meeting, which means that it has been four years since we met in Florianópolis. Our work had to be shifted to alternative virtual formats and we would like to express our appreciation for the work of the IWC Secretariat in organising the Virtual Special Meeting of the Commission that was held over three days in September 2021, addressing urgent issues which could not be delayed for another year. This has left us with an extremely busy agenda filled with important decisions for the IWC including the continued well-functioning of the organisation.

We welcome the progress made and the immense body of work carried out since the founding of the ICRW and acknowledge that an effective management regime and conservation can only be created through joint efforts and by initiatives that promote mutual trust and cooperation between all International Whaling Commission members.

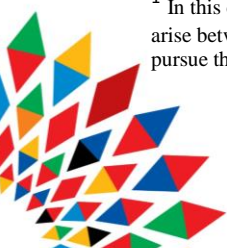
We would like to sincerely thank the Co-Chairs, the co-leads of the drafting groups and all members of the Working Group on Operational Effectiveness (WG-OE) for their work on consolidating various contributions resulting from the extensive consultations in the past 4 years.

We are generally supportive of the work done, as this improves the meeting operations and make the IWC a more robust and effective organisation. We look forward to any further discussions on these important issues.

We are confident that the International Whaling Commission is now ready to follow a new course characterised by increased transparency and effectiveness which will contribute greatly to the governance of the IWC and its working practices.

Part of making the IWC a futureproof and robust organisation is having a balanced and sustainable budget. Therefore, the EU Member States are committed to contribute to the discussions on this matter and to assist the Chair in finding the acceptable solution which will secure the effective operations of the Commission in the future. We note with extreme concern the serious financial situation the IWC currently finds itself in and are disappointed that the Scientific Committee is facing severe budget cuts despite its increasing agenda. Being aware of this important decision on the budget to be adopted during this meeting, the EU and its Member States would like to further express their sincere gratitude to the Chair of the Budgetary Sub-Committee and all participants to the process that led to the proposal of the Budget

¹ In this context, we note that Greenland and the Faeroe Islands are Danish Overseas countries but not European Union countries. Should divergences arise between the interests of the European Union and those of the afore-mentioned territories, Denmark may need to intervene on their behalf to pursue the latter's interests.





Reform Strategy, which has been submitted by the WG-OE for the consideration in this meeting. We applaud the inclusiveness and transparency that led to this proposal.

Among the initiatives for consideration at this meeting that would significantly help to improve the conservation, protection and status of whales globally is the creation of a South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary. We thank Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay for submitting this proposal and urge all Contracting Governments to adopt this well thought-out and scientifically convincing proposal at this meeting.

We reiterate the support of the EU and its Member States for the sustainable management of aboriginal subsistence whaling (ASW) that ensures the conservation of cetacean populations, having due regard to the precautionary principle and of the advice of the IWC Scientific Committee, while ensuring that whaling activities are regulated and catches are sustainable.

Furthermore, the EU and its Member States, would like to extend their thanks to the Scientific Committee for its continued hard work across an impressively wide range of topics during the last four years. It is extremely encouraging to see such a large group of respected experts working together to make real progress in cetacean research and to provide valuable advice to support the important work of the IWC. We are also pleased that since the last Commission meeting, the Conservation Committee has continued its important work including that on many conservation issues, including new, four-year BMI Work Plan (2021-2024), progress on the IWC Whale Watching Handbook, the nomination for a Conservation Management Plan for South American river dolphins, extensive work on the new Ship Strikes Work Plan 2020-2022, including support for opening position of the new IWC Data Manager post, the identification of various anthropogenic threats, the further investigation of the contribution of cetaceans to healthy ecosystem functioning, and the establishment task teams providing practical support to some of our most vulnerable small cetaceans. We also support the proposal of the WG-OE on the new structure of the Commission in which the Conservation Committee becomes one of four primary Committees. We support the endorsed aims and principles of the updated IWC Database of Recommendations (DoR) and their incorporation into the working practices of the Scientific and Conservation Committees.

We also note with concern increasing anthropogenic activities and their impacts, such as ship strikes, fisheries bycatch, entanglement, chemical, plastic and noise pollution, habitat loss and climate change, which have serious consequences on the marine environment, including cetaceans.

We welcome all collaborative efforts to better understand these impacts and prevent and minimize them. We note with satisfaction the continued positive progress being made in the IWC context in considering the implications of non-hunting threats to cetaceans.

In this regard, the EU and its Member States are pleased to table a resolution on addressing an important threat to cetaceans.

In recent years the issue of marine plastic pollution has accelerated the social, political and conservation agendas. Marine plastic pollution is now recognised as a major global threat to ocean and ecosystems health, biodiversity, livelihoods and wild animal conservation and welfare. The life cycle of plastics contributes to both biodiversity loss and climate change. We believe that given the fact that marine debris and plastic pollution has become a major threat for all levels of the marine ecosystem this issue needs further international attention. The resolution would provide critical IWC support for international negotiations on a global plastic treaty to tackle the serious threats to cetaceans including entanglement





and ingestion. The work requested of the Secretariat and the Scientific Committee should be considered in light of the current savings and in the context of other priorities as directed by the Commission, and could potentially be covered by voluntary funds.

Although the IWC can recognise the work done by competent international organisations, such as the FAO, it is not itself the forum for taking resolutions on human rights or food security as defined in other fora. The IWC has its own objectives as set out in the ICRW itself. The IWC is a competent body on cetacean conservation and management, and it should continue to draw attention to the consequences of unregulated/unmanaged hunts and to cooperate with others in ending them. At the same time, we acknowledge that whaling is of importance for the nutritional and cultural life of some aboriginal communities. The EU and its Member States express their willingness to discuss this issue.

The EU has always strongly supported the maintenance of the moratorium on commercial whaling as it has provided critical protection for great whales and continues to play an effective role in protecting whale populations, including by helping critically depleted populations to recover. We would like to reiterate our support for the maintenance and full implementation of the moratorium, representing a tool for avoiding any additional stress to the already cumulative impacts of other anthropogenic activities on cetaceans, which pose a severe threat to the long-term survival of various populations.

The EU and its Member States note with great satisfaction the expanded cooperation of the IWC with a very wide range of international organizations and believe this underlines the relevance of, and recognition given to, the expertise of the IWC worldwide.

We express our willingness to discuss all proposals and draft resolutions that have been tabled and to gain a better understanding of the issues. In order to achieve the best possible outcome and based on the spirit of cooperation within the IWC, we believe we should strive to reach consensus where possible. We will work actively and constructively to ensure that this 68th meeting is successful and produces tangible results.

With its broad legal mandate and decades of expertise in cetacean management, conservation and welfare, the IWC is the best-placed international intergovernmental organisation to understand and respond to the effects on cetaceans of declining ocean health, climate change and the biodiversity crisis. It is time to secure that the IWC continues to address the environmental crises facing the oceans – by itself and through cooperation with other multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), intergovernmental organisations and all stakeholders that can take effective action.

