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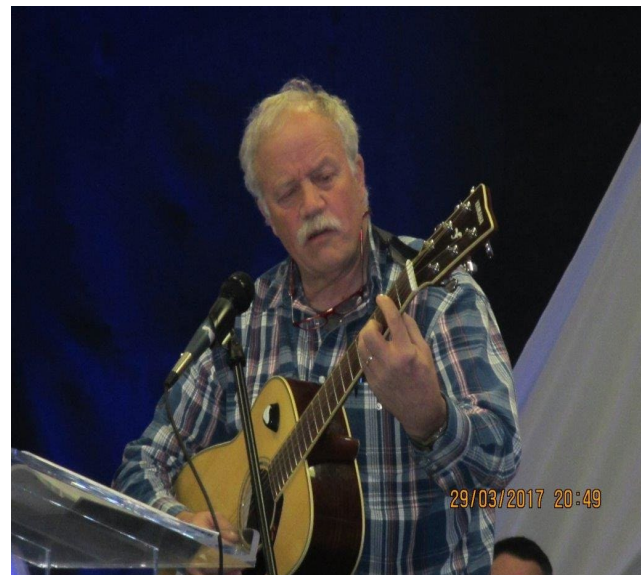
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c.c. Accredited observers to the IWC

Tribute to Dr. John Craighead “Craig” George



On 5 July 2023, Dr. John Craighead “Craig” George died in a tragic rafting accident in Alaska. He was only 70 years old. The International Whaling Commission (IWC) lost a long-time member of its Scientific Committee (SC). While contributing to many items on the SC agenda, Craig also demonstrated an eagerness to listen to other’s backgrounds and perspectives, a willingness to humbly share his own views and experiences, and an interest in promoting a warm sense of community among SC scientists, especially during opportunities to make music together.

Dr. George worked for the North Slope Borough’s (NSB; a municipality in northern Alaska) Department of Wildlife Management and collaborated extensively with the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission (AEWC) and its whaling captains from the early 1980s until 2023. The goal

Chair: Amadou Télivel Diallo (Republic of Guinea)

Vice-Chair: Nick Gales (Australia)

Executive Secretary: Rebecca Lent

of the NSB and AEWG was, and continues to be, to provide the best and most relevant information about bowhead whales to the IWC. Craig first attended a meeting of the SC in 1987 and continued almost every year through 2023, while also periodically participating in the Commission meetings. He authored or co-authored more than 185 papers for the SC or other Commission subgroups. Craig's focus was on aboriginal subsistence whaling, specifically on Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort (BCB) bowheads, but he was also intensely interested in ecology, physiology, and anatomy of whales. In recent years, he was increasingly concerned with human impacts and climate change. His contributions, with many collaborators, to the IWC and more broadly to science included: (1) documenting the size, growth and recovery of BCB bowheads from commercial whaling; (2) incorporating acoustic monitoring into population surveys; (3) promoting the wise management of subsistence whaling; (4) documenting that the age of bowheads can exceed 200 years; (5) determining that some cetaceans have an active sense of smell; and (6) providing a much better understanding of the anatomy, physiology and ecology of bowhead diet, feeding and blubber. Much of this information and more was made accessible through the recent book, "The Bowhead Whale *Balaena mysticetus*: Biology and Human Interactions", that he co-edited with Hans Thewissen. Due to the decades of scientific effort by Craig and his collaborators, BCB bowheads are one of the best understood whale populations worldwide.

Craig was successful in part due to his dedication to merging scientific knowledge with indigenous or traditional knowledge. That approach took patience and respectful listening to elders and whale hunters, but the effort resulted in confirmation of the knowledge of Inuit hunters and in excellent scientific data that were more accessible to both scientists and Inuit communities. The deep respect the whalers had for Craig created many new opportunities for other scientists to collect data and conduct studies on bowheads, thereby improving our understanding of bowhead ecology and providing for breakthroughs in diverse scientific areas which also helped to inform management decisions. An example of the bond Craig shared with the Inuit community is that the Barrow Whaling Captains' Association elected Craig as an honorary whaling captain.

In addition to being an outstanding and innovative scientist, Craig was also one of the nicest people you could ever meet. He was unfailingly warm, kind, generous, and humble. He was sincerely interested in the perspectives and experiences of others and could find gentle humour almost anywhere. At most SC meetings, Craig also shared his remarkable musical talent. He routinely had his guitar in hand and was perhaps at his happiest when playing music with a group of scientists late into the night. He usually sang a song or two during SC dinners that left smiles on the faces of SC members and the Secretariat alike.

His family, many friends, and indeed the IWC will miss his many contributions to science and the ways he enriched all our lives through his kindness, respect, and music.

**Robert Suydam, Geof Givens, John Citta, Alex Zerbini, Lindsay Porter
and members of the IWC Secretariat**