



# International Whaling Commission

Chairman  
Mr Michael Canny (Ireland)

Vice-Chairman  
Prof. Bo Fernholm (Sweden)

Secretary  
Dr Ray Gambell OBE

RG/JAC/27611

**The Red House**  
**135 Station Road**  
**Impington**  
**Cambridge**  
**CB4 9NP, UK**

Tel: +44 (0) 1223 233971

Fax: +44 (0) 1223 232876

*EMail: iwcoffice@compuserve.com*  
14 October 1999

## CIRCULAR COMMUNICATION TO COMMISSIONERS AND CONTRACTING GOVERNMENTS IWC.CCG.77

### Health Effects from the Consumption of Cetaceans

At the 51<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting of the Commission, held in Grenada, 24 – 28 May 1999, IWC Resolution 1999-4 on the Health Effects from the Consumption of Cetaceans was adopted (copy appended).

The Secretary, as instructed, sent a copy of this Resolution to the World Health Organisation (WHO), which has now replied as shown in the letter dated 23 September 1999 (enclosed with the postal version of this Circular Communication). This indicates that WHO does not have any data on cetaceans at present, but will request its participating institutions in over 70 countries to provide any information they are holding. In addition, WHO would like to ensure that the sampling, analysis and reporting of data coming through the IWC and our Scientific Committee are consistent with international methodology and norms.

The brochures enclosed with the WHO letter:

GEMS/Food International Dietary Survey: Infant Exposure to Certain Organochlorine Contaminants from Breast Milk – a Risk Assessment (*WHO/FSF/FOS/98.4*)

and

Risk assessment of microbiological hazards in foods (*WHO/SDE/PHE/FOS/99.5*)

are held in the Secretariat, together with the document

Food Safety – An Essential Public Health Issue for the New Millennium (*WHO/SDE/PHE/FOS/994*).

The issue of all effects on human health from the consumption of cetacean products will appear under the permanent agenda item on Environmental Concerns for the 52<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting of the Commission to be held in Adelaide, Australia, 3-6 July 2000.

Dr. R. Gambell  
Secretary to the Commission

## **IWC Resolution 1999-4**

### **RESOLUTION ON HEALTH EFFECTS FROM THE CONSUMPTION OF CETACEANS**

NOTING that while the consumption of cetacean products may have positive health effects, scientific evidence demonstrates that some communities may be faced with health problems arising from the high levels of organic contaminants and heavy metals present in those products in their diet;

RECALLING that IWC Resolution 1998-11 expressed the Commission's concern about human health effects from the consumption of cetaceans, invited Contracting Governments to submit information to the IWC and asked the Secretariat to correspond with the WHO and other appropriate authorities;

NOTING that regulatory limits for contaminants in food are set by competent national and international authorities;

NOTING that the Scientific Committee is the appropriate body to review and provide to the competent authorities information relevant to the health of cetaceans relating to chemical contaminant burdens;

NOW THEREFORE THE COMMISSION

CALLS ON relevant countries to take measures to reduce pollution that may cause negative health effects from the consumption of cetacean products;

AGREES to keep under review, under the permanent Agenda Item on Environmental Concerns, all effects on Human Health from the consumption of cetacean products;

REQUESTS the Scientific Committee to receive, review and collate data on contaminant burdens in cetaceans and forward this as appropriate to the WHO and competent national authorities, and to report on this matter to the Commission;

ENCOURAGES Contracting Governments, other countries and relevant organisations to continue to forward relevant data concerning contaminants in cetaceans to the Scientific Committee;

INSTRUCTS the IWC Secretariat to send this Resolution to the WHO Secretariat.



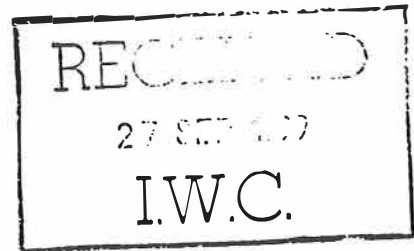
Téléphone Central/Exchange: 791. 2111  
Direct: 791. 3698  
Email:

In reply please refer to: FOS/PHE  
Prière de rappeler la référence:

Your reference:  
Votre référence:

Dr Ray Gambell  
The Whaling Commission  
The Red House  
135 Station Road  
Impington  
Cambridge CB4 9NP  
United Kingdom

23 September 1999



Dear Dr Gambell,

In reference to your letter dated 14 July 1999, I would like to thank you for providing a copy of the IWC Resolution 1999-4 regarding the possible health effects from the consumption of cetaceans. The World Health Organization through its Global Environment Monitoring System / Food Contamination Monitoring and Assessment Programme (GEMS/Food) has been collecting information on the levels and trends of contamination of food since 1976.

While GEMS/Food at present does not have any data on cetaceans, we will request our Participating Institutions located in over 70 countries around the world to provide us with any information they are holding. We will also encourage them to collect such information as we have seen rather high levels of persistent organic pollutants (POPs) in the breast milk of Inuit women whose diets are rich in marine mammals.

We would also like to be in contact with the IWC Scientific Committee to assure that the sampling, analysis and reporting of data are consistent with international methodology and norms. Some discussion at this point will go a long way toward assuring the data collected by the Scientific Committee is reliable, consistent and comparable. We also have a data handling package we call OPAL (Operating Program for Analytical Laboratories) that we are prepared to share with the Scientific Committee which would make data handling easier for them and assure seamless transmission of data to the GEMS/Food database in Geneva.

Once we have sufficient information to conduct an exposure assessment, WHO would be in a position to prepare an assessment of the risks to public health posed by consumption of cetaceans. I am attaching for your information a brochure on GEMS/Food and a recent report on the risk assessment of chemical contaminants in human milk.

Yours sincerely,

  
Dr Gerald Moy  
GEMS/Food Coordinator  
Food Safety Programme