

22/09/2024

69th Meeting of the International Whaling Commission

23 – 27 September 2024, Lima, Peru

EU AND ITS MEMBER STATES

OPENING STATEMENT

The EU and its Member States that are Party to the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW)¹, wish to thank the Government and the People of Peru for hosting the 69th Meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and for their wonderful hospitality in Lima. We also appreciate the Secretariat for organizing this meeting and for preparing all the documents.

We recognize the numerous achievements since the ICRW's establishment, owing to efforts during meetings and intersessional periods. Effective management and conservation of cetaceans require joint initiatives fostering mutual trust among all IWC members. The moratorium on commercial whaling has provided critical protection for great whales, allowing some populations to recover. Therefore, we continue to support maintaining the moratorium and consider it a central tool for their protection. We urge all Governments, particularly those still engaged in commercial whaling, to align with the overwhelming scientific evidence supporting continued protections. Now is the time for collective action to strengthen, not weaken, the IWC's mandate and ensure the survival of these species.

The European Union and its Member States that are Party to the ICRW strongly support the Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling (ASW) automatic renewal process as adopted during IWC67. We commend the Commission's handling of the automatic renewal process and we appreciate the stepwise and transparent intersessional process leading up to IWC69, demonstrating that the IWC can make important decisions about quota management. We also greatly appreciate the support the Scientific Committee (SC) provided in this process, notably its work on the unusual mortality event affecting the Eastern North Pacific gray whale population and we commend ongoing research into the Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Seas bowhead whale populations. Finally, we are grateful for the openness of the ASW countries during the renewal process.

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 aforementioned territories, Denmark may need to intervene on their behalf to pursue the latter's interests.

22/09/2024

We express our appreciation for the Secretariat's excellent work. We thank Rebecca Lent for all her work as Executive Secretary and welcome Martha Rojas Urrego, wishing her success in her new role. The Secretariat also moved offices, as the Red House was no longer fit for purpose. In these circumstances, the IWC Secretariat maintained its commitment and quality of work and we express our gratitude for this.

The European Union and its Member States that are Party to the ICRW would like to raise their serious concerns regarding Japan's decision to expand its commercial whaling program to fin whales. We strongly regret the lack of engagement with the IWC and its SC prior to the decision. We contest Japan's claim that this decision is based on the IWC's Revised Management Procedure.

We commend Iceland and take this opportunity to recognize the excellent reputation Iceland has built for the responsible and sustainable management of marine resources and for its continued involvement in helping drive forward improvements in conservation outcomes globally. At the same time, we deeply regret the decision to grant a license to kill 128 fin whales during the 2024 hunting season, although we note that no commercial whaling has taken place. We acknowledge that a working group is currently reviewing and exploring future whaling policies, including welfare issues, and look forward to its conclusions.

We remain concerned about Norway's continued whaling activities, particularly recent relaxation of controls, and the use of less precautionary tuning levels not endorsed by the IWC.

While acknowledging the progress made in various areas of marine conservation, we urge all relevant parties to engage in constructive dialogue with the global community. We remain open to discussions on how to better align actions with our shared conservation goals and to ensure that the hard-won achievements of the IWC are upheld and not compromised.

We are deeply concerned about the cumulative impacts of human activities – such as ship strikes, bycatch, and pollution – on cetaceans and the marine environment. These, coupled with commercial whaling, pose serious threats to the long-term survival of cetaceans and ocean health. We acknowledge the progress made at IWC68, in addressing these serious threats, notably, the consensus adoption of the Marine Plastic Pollution resolution, deemed a major achievement, and we remain committed to its further implementation.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to all the IWC (sub-)committees for the work accomplished during the intersessional period. The numerous Chairs, Vice-Chairs,

22/09/2024

convenors and active members of these groups are essential for the advancement of the work within the IWC.

We commend the Conservation Committee for the substantial work accomplished during the intersessional period. We welcome the new Bycatch Mitigation Initiative workplan, fully support the endorsement of four new Conservation Management Plans and reiterate our support for the ongoing work on marine debris. We would also like to highlight the importance of the creation of a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) in the Northwestern Mediterranean Sea.

The European Union and its Member States that are Party to the ICRW are grateful for all the efforts by the SC to inform the Commission and allowing us to engage in science-based policy making. We are therefore committed to supporting the work of the SC on the conservation and management of cetaceans and thank the Committee for its support on various cetacean conservation initiatives within the EU Member States. We reaffirm our commitment to addressing threats to cetacean populations and managing these effectively.

We are alarmed by the near-extinction of the critically endangered vaquita porpoise. Therefore, we support the SC's issuance of the first-ever Extinction Alert as a crucial step in addressing this crisis. We emphasize the urgent need for coordinated action, leveraging multilateral agreements such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), to prevent the extinction of this species.

We encourage parties to take action on several important issues and urge IWC69 to adopt our proposed resolutions on International Legal Obligations in Commercial Whaling Activities, on Synergies between the IWC, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the Agreement on Marine Biodiversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement, as well as the one on-cooperation with the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR).

At the same time, we must also express our concern about recurring proposals for resolutions that undermine the Commission's collective achievements, such as the intention to lift the moratorium as well as matters obviously falling outside the IWC's mandate.

We reiterate our support for the creation of a South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary, which would greatly enhance whale conservation on a global scale. We thank Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay for re-submitting this proposal and urge all Contracting Governments to adopt it.

22/09/2024

We also extend our gratitude to the Working Group on Operation and Effectiveness (WG-OE) for consolidating various contributions, especially regarding quorum. We are confident that adopting one of the presented options will strengthen the IWC's decision-making capacity and make it more effective and transparent.

We commend the Budgetary Sub-Committee on the implementation of the Budgetary Reform Strategy and are confident that, through zero-based budgeting and four-year budget planning, we can achieve a balanced budget and ensure the IWC's long-term financial sustainability. The EU and its Member States that are Party to the ICRW will actively contribute to discussions and assist the Chair in finding solutions to ensure that the IWC can move forward with a balanced budget. At the same time, we remain concerned about the IWC's serious financial challenges, particularly the budget cuts, such as those affecting the SC. As the Committee's agenda continues to expand, ensuring adequate funding is vital to maintaining the IWC's essential scientific work. We remain dedicated to finding practical solutions that support both the IWC's financial health and its objectives.

In closing, we reaffirm our readiness to engage constructively on all proposals, with the goal of fostering greater collaboration within the IWC. Consensus, whenever possible, is crucial for success. Our shared responsibility to conserve cetaceans and maintain the health of our oceans transcends our differences. While perspectives may vary, the IWC's broad legal mandate and unparalleled expertise remain essential for effective cetacean conservation and management. As we navigate this 69th Meeting, let our commitment to cooperation and shared purpose lead the way forward.