



Australian Government

OPENING STATEMENT

64th Annual Meeting of the International Whaling Commission

July 2012, Panama City, Panama

Opening Statement by Australia

The Australian Government is pleased to submit the following opening statement to the 64th annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission.

We thank the Republic of Panama of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) for hosting the annual meeting and for the support provided by the Secretariat.

Over recent years the Commission has demonstrated that even where considerable differences in positions remain, Contracting Governments are able to work together in a constructive and mutually respectful manner.

Australia considers that the best way forward for the Commission in 2012 is to continue to build on the increased understanding that has emerged, and engage in an incremental, 'ground up' approach, focussing on areas where agreement can be reached, and where countries can work together to take important steps forward for achieving healthy whale populations globally.

In particular, Australia considers the advancement of conservation initiatives and proposed governance reforms to be an important focus of the Commission's work program.

Specifically Australia gives high priority to the development of conservation management plans, progressing the whalewatching strategic plan, improving actions to address human induced threats to cetaceans, such as ship strikes and marine debris, and improving governance of the Commission.

Together, these initiatives and reforms are helping to ensure there is an enhanced focus on cetacean conservation while also improving the transparency and accountability of the Commission in line with best practice approaches in other international organisations.

Decades ago, the whaling industry drove most of the world's great whales close to extinction. In response, the IWC recognised that the overexploitation and consequent depletion of whale stocks could not be permitted to continue and adopted the moratorium on commercial whaling.

Australia strongly supports the moratorium on commercial whaling, and is convinced that it remains the principal strategy ensuring the recovery of worldwide whale populations. There are new indications of recovery of many of the affected populations which are being aided by our collective scientific and conservation management endeavours.

Today, however, whales face additional new and emergent threats to their recovery; among them being the influence of human activities on climate change in the ocean, including changes in the surface and deep water circulation, water temperature, sea ice extent and season and the acidity of sea water resulting from accumulating dissolved carbon dioxide.

As many of us in the Commission recognise, these changes may have an impact upon the ecosystems of the Southern Ocean. Notably, ocean acidification will affect the production of krill, the food source for many of the great whales.

We must remain vigilant in responding to all threats that confront the recovering whale populations.

Many nations, including Australia, have non-lethal research programs in the Southern Ocean, and also work closely through the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources and the Antarctic Treaty System.

In developing the Australian initiated and Commission-endorsed non-lethal Southern Ocean Research Partnership, Contracting Parties are working together to focus international, collaborative efforts on whale conservation.

By enhancing these partnerships, we will move forward cooperatively to better understand all the threats that face the Southern Ocean, ultimately to improve the health and status of global whale populations and the marine environment.

Australia's views on whaling are well known – we strongly oppose all commercial whaling, including Japan's so-called 'scientific' whaling.

In particular, the Government considers that Japan's so called 'scientific' whaling is contrary to its international obligations and should stop. That is why, on 31 May 2010, the Government initiated legal action against Japan in the International Court of Justice.

However, Australia and Japan have consistently said that our differences over whaling should not affect the strong and positive bilateral relationship, or our capacity to work constructively together within the IWC. Over recent years the Commission has demonstrated that even where considerable differences in positions remain, Contracting Governments are able to work together in a constructive and mutually respectful manner.

Australia continues to believe that the IWC remains the appropriate international organisation to address the conservation and management of whales, and we remain committed to, and closely engaged in, the International Whaling Commission in an effort to drive real and constructive pro-conservation reform.

Australia invites all Contracting Parties to recognise the importance of international collaboration and support the study and conservation of cetaceans and the marine environment.