



NRDC OPENING STATEMENT
INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION 64th ANNUAL MEETING
Panama City, Panama
July 2-7, 2012

The Natural Resources Defense Council (“NRDC”) is a non-profit environmental organization headquartered in the United States with over 1.3 million members and activists, a staff of around 400 lawyers, scientists, and resource specialists, and over a 40-year history of advocacy on a broad range of environmental and conservation issues. Through litigation and other advocacy, NRDC has spearheaded successful challenges to a number of government and industry activities posing threats to marine mammal populations around the world, including activities proposed by the U.S. Navy, the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service, the U.S. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement, Mitsubishi Corporation, and others. NRDC is also a leader in publicizing and fighting the risks of ocean noise pollution and climate change to marine mammals and other marine species.

NRDC welcomes the opportunity to submit this opening statement for the 64th Meeting of the International Whaling Commission in Panama City, Panama. We wish to express our appreciation to Panama for its warm hospitality.

NRDC Statement of Principles

In 1999, NRDC formally adopted, and today maintains, a policy statement on whaling. That policy reads, in part:

(1) NRDC opposes the killing of whales, recognizing (i) the historic widespread slaughter of whale species for commercial purposes, (ii) the continuing threats to many whale species and the uncertainty of their recovery from near extinction, (iii) the continuing pressure to resume commercial whaling and the difficulties of regulating trade in whale products, and (iv) the special significance of whales to many people around the world, including a great number of NRDC members.

(2) NRDC respects the sovereignty of indigenous peoples and takes great pride in its efforts to work with and support Native Americans, as well as in its alliances with indigenous peoples internationally, for the protection of the environment. NRDC recognizes that the subsistence and cultural practices of indigenous peoples are not responsible for the decimation of whale species, which was caused by whaling for commercial purposes.

(3) Therefore, NRDC will oppose all killing of whales for commercial purposes and reserves the right to respond on a case-by-case basis to claims by indigenous peoples for killing of small numbers of whales based on subsistence and cultural need.

In Opposition to Commercial Whaling

Consistent with this policy statement, NRDC opposes any initiative to resume, expand, permit, or legitimize commercial whaling. NRDC believes that the commercial whaling moratorium has been an effective conservation measure. NRDC also affirms the importance of sanctuaries and other marine

protected areas to the conservation of marine mammals. We therefore oppose all efforts to continue, expand or legitimize whaling in any whale sanctuary, including the Southern Ocean Sanctuary. Similarly, NRDC opposes commercial whaling in the form of either scientific whaling or aboriginal subsistence whaling. NRDC therefore encourages the Commission to apply the highest standard of scientific scrutiny in regard to Denmark's application for an increased aboriginal subsistence whaling quota for Greenland.

NRDC further opposes any effort to allow small-type coastal whaling under the moratorium. This form of commercial whaling meets none of the special circumstances that underlie the narrow exception made, under the moratorium, for aboriginal subsistence whaling, which, by contrast, is undertaken by native peoples with a continuing traditional and local dependence on whaling and the use of whales. Given the new spirit of cooperation at the IWC, the Commission should not countenance any efforts to politicize or condition quotas for genuine aboriginal subsistence needs on the expansion of coastal or scientific whaling.

In Support of the South Atlantic Sanctuary

NRDC affirms the importance of sanctuaries and other marine protected areas to the conservation of marine mammals. Accordingly, NRDC endorses the establishment of a whale sanctuary in the South Atlantic and opposes all efforts to strike, restrict, or otherwise impair the management of existing sanctuaries.

In Support of Conservation

Given the ongoing degradation of our oceans, NRDC believes it is critical that the IWC investigate, study, and manage impacts on whales resulting from sources other than commercial whaling, such as oil spills, climate change, ocean acidification, ocean noise pollution, entanglement, ship strikes, habitat loss, overfishing, contamination, and marine debris. The Conservation Committee plays a primary role in the health and protection of whales.

In Support of Increased Participation of Non-Governmental Organizations

NRDC strongly believes that the work of this Commission is greatly enhanced by the vigorous participation of non-governmental organizations ("NGOs"), which contribute valuable expertise to the process and which represent the views of millions of people worldwide with important stakes in the Commission's work. NGOs also play a vital role in increasing the transparency of international organizations, including the IWC. We support bringing the IWC in line with the standard practice of international conventions, which allow observers to speak at meetings by invitation of the chair. We therefore support amending the Rules of Procedure to allow full observer participation opportunities whereby observers, at the discretion of the chair, would be allowed to make substantive interventions on each agenda item.

In Support of Action on Ocean Noise Pollution

With regard to the growing problem of ocean noise pollution, we note the emerging international consensus on the need for measures to reduce the noise impacts of human activities on marine species and their environment. We have welcomed the initiative taken in previous years by the Scientific Committee to examine ocean noise pollution and its impact on cetaceans. NRDC notes with particular concern the mounting evidence, reviewed by the Scientific Committee, of significant harm to marine mammals caused by the military use of high-intensity active sonar, by seismic testing associated with oil development and geophysical surveying, and by commercial shipping (2005, 2007, 2011, 2012).

NRDC calls upon the IWC and its member states to carefully consider and act on the recommendations that the Scientific Committee has put forward to address the problem of ocean noise, including reducing anthropogenic noise impacts from commercial shipping, seismic surveys, military use of sonar, and other industrial activities, as well as reducing the impacts from anthropogenic noise on important cetacean habitat.

NRDC commends the United States for the work it has done to develop acoustic habitat maps depicting sounds from multiple sources and overlaying these maps with marine mammal seasonal distribution and density modeling to identify time and areas of concern. NRDC recommends using this modeling to develop precautionary measures to protect marine mammals from the harmful impacts of anthropogenic ocean noise. We support the endorsement and recommendation of the Scientific Committee to further develop and improve this modeling (2012). NRDC encourages the IWC establish a working group to both expand this modeling across the globe and to develop guidelines to address the impact of anthropogenic noise on cetaceans.

NRDC also commends the progress made on anthropogenic ocean noise by other intergovernmental authorities, including in the International Maritime Organization (“IMO”) and ACCOBAMS. We encourage the IWC to continue to coordinate with the IMO to develop guidelines for reducing underwater noise from commercial ships as well as support a Polar Code to control the expected increase in ship traffic in the Arctic.

In Support of the Workshop on Anthropogenic Impacts on Arctic Cetaceans

NRDC supports the Commission’s decision at IWC 62 to convene a workshop on anthropogenic impacts on cetaceans in the Arctic and strongly suggests that anthropogenic ocean noise be included as a central theme to be addressed during the workshop.

On the Future of the IWC

NRDC respects the essential role that the IWC plays in the international conservation of whales and supports maintaining the new spirit of cooperation within the IWC. We believe the IWC must envision a future that would truly improve the conservation of whales. NRDC is willing to work with member nations to find the best possible way forward – one that emphasizes the conservation of whales and does not undermine or circumvent the moratorium on commercial whaling or in any way legitimize the taking of whales for commercial or scientific research purposes. Decisive leadership is needed now to ensure a safer future for the world’s whales. And it is clear the future of the IWC lies with conservation, not whaling.