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CIRCULAR COMMUNICATION TO COMMISSIONERS
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Summary of outcomes of the
5th Special Meeting of the Commission and the private meeting of Commissioners on the RMS
14-17 October 2002, Cambridge, UK

Since not all Contracting Governments were able to participate in last week's meetings, I thought it would be helpful to provide all Commissioners and Contracting Governments with a brief summary on the outcomes of the meetings. The statement from the RMS Meeting was agreed by Commissioners at the end of the meeting. The summary of the Special Meeting has been prepared by the Secretariat.

A Chair's Report of the Special Meeting will be prepared, circulated and published in due course. Further information on the RMS meeting, including proposed next steps, will be circulated to Commissioners shortly.

Dr. Nicky Grandy
Secretary to the Commission

Statement

At its 54th Annual Meeting, the International Whaling Commission agreed to hold a special meeting of Commissioners to examine the outstanding issues required to finalise the Revised Management Scheme ([RMS](#))* for commercial whaling and to specify the future work needed to expedite its completion.

The meeting comprised representatives from 37 of the 49 member states. It was chaired by Henrik Fischer (Denmark), the Vice-Chairman of the Commission.

It met from 15-17 October 2002 in Cambridge, UK.

There was a valuable exchange of views and ideas on a number of difficult issues surrounding the completion of an RMS, including catch verification schemes, compliance reviews, costs, area restrictions, animal welfare data and other related issues. Progress was made in several areas where fundamental differences have been expressed in the past. A mechanism to build on this progress was established, including the establishment of three special working groups (on costs, catch verification and compliance). The next special Commissioners' meeting will take place prior to the next Annual Meeting of the Commission in Berlin in June 2003.

Issued on behalf of:

International Whaling Commission, The Red House, 135 Station Road, Impington, Cambridge CB4 9NP, UK. Tel: +44 (0) 1223 233971; Fax: +44 (0) 1223 232876; Email: Secretariat@iwcoffice.org

Web site: <http://www.iwcoffice.org>

Summary of the outcome of the Special Meeting

Special Meeting

The Special Meeting took place on 14 October 2002 at the DeVere University Arms Hotel, Cambridge, UK, under the Chairmanship of Prof. Bo Fernholm (Sweden).

14 October 2002

The primary purpose of the meeting was to reconsider the issue of catch limits for the aboriginal subsistence catch of bowhead whales. No new limits had been agreed at the 54th Annual Meeting. In addition it had been agreed to include an item on an interim relief allocation for Japanese coastal whaling. This had also been on the agenda of the 54th Annual meeting (and a number of previous meetings).

Icelandic membership

As at the last two Annual Meetings, the major item discussed in the morning concerned the adherence of Iceland to the Convention with a reservation to Paragraph 10(e). That paragraph refers to what is popularly termed the 'moratorium' on commercial whaling. For the full terms of the reservation submitted by Iceland, see below.

There was again a difference of views as to whether the Commission should accept Iceland's reservation. After a series of procedural votes, the Commission agreed by 19 votes to 18, that Iceland is a member of the Commission.

Catch limits for aboriginal subsistence whaling

At the 54th meeting, despite (i) agreement by the Scientific Committee that the bowhead whale stock was able to sustain the harvest, and (ii) acknowledgement of the cultural, nutritional and subsistence needs of both Alaskan Eskimos and native peoples of Chukotka, a proposal to continue to include provision for such catches failed to reach the necessary three-quarters majority (32 votes were in favour, 11 against and 2 abstentions).

At the Special Meeting, a proposal allowing up to 280 bowhead whales to be landed in the period 2003 - 2006, with no more than 67 whales struck in any year (and up to 15 unused strikes may be carried over each year), was accepted by consensus (Japan did not join, but did not block consensus). It contains a proviso that this be reviewed in the light of the Scientific Committee's work at the 2004 meeting and beyond.

Interim relief allocation for Japanese coastal whaling

This issue has been discussed by the Commission for the last 15 years. It concerns the possible allocation of a catch of 50 minke whales annually to four Japanese coastal communities until the Commission has finalised a Revised Management Scheme. A draft resolution was proposed by Japan intended to forward discussions on the issue and arrive expeditiously at a solution. It was defeated by 19 votes to 16 with 2 abstentions.

Iceland's reservation

The instrument of adherence states, in translation, that Iceland:

“adheres to the aforesaid Convention and Protocol with a reservation with respect to paragraph 10(e) of the Schedule attached to the Convention.”

The instrument further states the following:

Notwithstanding this, the Government of Iceland will not authorize whaling for commercial purposes by Icelandic vessels before 2006 and, thereafter, will not authorize such whaling while progress is being made in negotiations within the International Whaling Commission on the Revised Management Scheme. This does not apply, however, in case of the so-called moratorium on whaling for commercial purposes, contained in paragraph 10 (e) of the Schedule, not being lifted within reasonable time after the completion of the Revised Management Scheme.

Under no circumstances will whaling for commercial purposes be authorized in Iceland without a sound scientific basis and an effective management and enforcement scheme.

The instrument of adherence also states that

the reservation is an integral part of the instrument.