

CIRCULAR COMMUNICATION TO COMMISSIONERS
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Discussions of the Small Working Group on the Future of the IWC

As you will be aware, the Small Working Group (SWG) on the Future of the IWC, established by the Commission at IWC/60 in Santiago, met in Florida from 15-18 September 2008 under the chairmanship of Ambassador de Soto. His progress report has been circulated to all Commissioners.

The SWG's Terms of Reference require it to present a report on the results of its initial deliberations to an intersessional meeting of the Commission foreseen for the February/March 2009 timeframe. Based on its discussions at that meeting, the Commission will direct the SWG to continue working on a possible package or packages and develop a final report that will be distributed at least 5 weeks before IWC/61. At its organisational meeting in Santiago, the SWG believed that it would be efficient for the SWG to meet immediately after the intersessional Commission meeting; this is currently what is being planned. The meeting dates and venue for the 2009 intersessional meetings are being finalised and an announcement will be made shortly.

Useful discussions took place at the SWG's meeting in Florida as outlined in Ambassador de Soto's progress report. However, with a view to complying with the Commission's request for a report from the SWG at least 5 weeks before IWC/61, the SWG agreed that it should meet again in the second week of December to build on the progress made in Florida and to take into account consultations of SWG members with the wider IWC membership following that meeting. Plans are in place for the SWG to meet in Cambridge, UK from 8 to 10 December 2008.

It is clear from the SWG's Terms of Reference agreed by the Commission in Santiago, that involvement in this group requires substantial commitment from its members in terms of time and resources. Indeed during the recent meeting in Florida, a number of developing country SWG members mentioned the financial burden incurred through attendance at intersessional meetings and the problems they may face with their continued involvement in the group, particularly given the need for a second meeting in December (and particularly when such meetings have been decided after government's annual budgets have already been set).

Recognising the difficulties faced by some developing country members of the SWG, the importance of discussions on the future of the IWC and the need to maintain a balanced SWG membership with continuity between meetings, several Contracting Governments have offered to help defray costs of the participation of developing country SWG members through supplementary financial contributions. Clearly a procedure will need to be developed for how such funds would be distributed and the Secretariat will develop such a procedure in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Commission and the Chair of the Finance and Administration Committee. Additional contributions from other Contracting Governments would be welcome. If your Government is interested in making such a contribution, please contact the Secretariat.



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