

**Information note on sustainability of Icelandic catch limits
for the East Greenland-Iceland stock of fin whales**

Submitted by Iceland

Reference is made to document IWC/63/15, submitted by Argentina, Belgium, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Monaco, New Zealand and the United States.

The document includes misleading information on the scientific basis for the Icelandic catch limits for the East Greenland-Iceland stock of fin whales. The Delegation of Iceland therefore requests that the following information on sustainability of Icelandic catch limits for the stock be included under this item in the Chairman's report of the 63rd Annual Meeting:

Icelandic whaling quotas are based on the best scientific advice available at any time. Given the contribution of fisheries to the national economy of Iceland, long-term sustainability of the utilization of living marine resources based on solid precautionary scientific advice is of immense importance to Iceland.

It should be recalled that the Scientific Committee had recommended three tuning levels (0.6, 0.66 and 0.72) for the RMP based on extensive testing over many years. Subsequently, the Commission chose to use only the 0.72 tuning level. This choice was based purely on political, non-scientific basis. This decision by the Commission in effect forbids the Scientific Committee to work further on any other tuning level, including the running of *Implementation Simulation Trials* (IST) on a stock-by-stock basis. Thus, it is a circular argumentation to use the lack of such work by the Scientific Committee as arguments in the debate within the very same Commission that has prevented that work to be done. However, Norway has tested the 0.6 tuning level for the North East Atlantic minke whale stock and found it to perform acceptably and be safe. Just like for Iceland, Norway's catch limits are based on the RMP with a tuning level of 0.6.

Several scientific assessments have been conducted on the East Greenland-Iceland stock of fin whales under the auspices of the Scientific Committee of NAMMCO. These assessments are based on the same general principles as the RMP and have benefitted from the participation of specialists from around the world including several of the most prominent members of the Scientific Committee of the IWC in the field of the RMP. These assessments have repeatedly shown a healthy status of this population and that the catches taken by Iceland are sustainable even under the most pessimistic assumption considered plausible.

As regards the RMP implementation within the Scientific Committee of the IWC, Iceland stressed that this is work in progress. The number resulting from Variant 6 (46 whales) is just one of many included in a table produced by the Commission's Scientific Assessment Group (SAG) in 2010. The preferred Variant 2 falls under the category "acceptable with research". At SC62 and SC63, the Scientific Committee discussed the methodology of draft research proposals to accompany Variant 2 submitted by Iceland. This year the Scientific Committee agreed in principle the

suggested methodology and therefore a formal agreement of the proposal is expected at SC64.

While the RMP implementation is not fully completed, it is important to note that by definition the category “acceptable with research” means that the variant in question (Variant 2) has been proven to be safe for at least a 10-year period irrespective of the outcome of the research programme. Therefore, the catch limits set by Iceland have been proven to be sustainable and safe for at least 10 years by the Scientific Committees of both NAMMCO and the IWC.

An alternative way of evaluating the sustainability of the catches is to apply a relatively simple procedure that has been tested and accepted by the Scientific Committee of the IWC as safe for at least 10 years and applied to aboriginal subsistence whaling. According to this method, the annual quota is simply 2% of the lower 5th percentile of the latest accepted abundance estimate. For the East Greenland-Iceland fin whale stock (most recent abundance estimate 20,600 - 95% CI: 15,053-26,540), this would amount to an annual quota of 301 whales, almost double the quota issued by Iceland (154). Iceland’s view is that catch limits should be based purely on scientific evidence for sustainability and not the type of whaling operation or other non-scientific factors. Thus, catch levels deemed by the Scientific Committee to be safe and sustainable for aboriginal hunts are also safe for commercial whaling. Viewed proportionally to population size, the quotas set by Iceland for fin whales are in fact similar to those set for the United States catches for bowheads off Alaska. Both of these amount to well under 1% of the respective population sizes.