

PRESS RELEASE: DAY 1

The 64th Annual Meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) began this morning at the El Panama Hotel and Conference Centre, Panama City. The meeting was opened by the Interim Chair, Herman Oosthuizen (South Africa). The welcome address was provided by His Excellency Roberto Henriquez, Minister of Foreign Affairs for Panama. Also present were: His Excellency Salomon Shamah, Minister of Tourism; His Excellency Francisco Alvarez de Soto, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs; and the Honourable Giovanni Lauri, Administrator of Aquatic Resources. Simon Brockington, the Secretary to the Commission, responded on behalf of the IWC.

The meeting itself will be Chaired by Bruno Mainini (Switzerland). Elections for the vacant Chair and Vice-Chair of the Commission will be held at the end of the meeting.

The adopted agenda is given as [IWC/64/1](#). The first item of business discussed was the **South Atlantic Sanctuary** (Item4). The proposal to establish a Sanctuary in these waters has been discussed for several years. The proposal can be found as [IWC/64/8 rev1](#). After some discussion the proposal was put a vote. In order to be adopted, the proposal required a three-quarters majority of those voting. The final vote was 38 in favour, 28 against and 2 abstentions. Thus the proposal did not achieve the required majority.

The Commission then had a short discussion and exchange of views under its Item 5 '**the IWC in the Future**'. There was no action arising.

In the afternoon, the Commission heard the report of its Scientific Committee ([IWC/64/Rep1](#)) on the status of a number of whale stocks (Item 6).

The first of these was the **Antarctic minke whale**. After several years, the Committee has completed the reanalysis of the extensive data from the long series of data from the IWC's IDCR and SOWER cruises. Total circumpolar estimates were agreed of about 720,000 for the period 1985/86-1990/91 (known as CPII) and 515,000 for the period 1992/93-2003/04 (known as CPIII). When corrected for survey area, there is a decline of about 30% but this is not statistically significant. The Committee is now examining ways to determine if there is a true decline and if so what is the cause.

The next stocks considered were the **Southern Hemisphere humpback whales**, where the Committee's focus is on addressing the status of the animals that breed off eastern Australia, Oceania and French Polynesia. This work will be completed in 2014. The Committee also received information from scientists working on humpback whales from Panama, Costa Rica and Ecuador. Photo-identification is a powerful tool to understanding many aspects of whale biology and abundance. The Committee's ongoing Antarctic humpback whale catalogue now has over 4,600 identified animals.

The Committee completed a circumpolar assessment of blue whales in 2008. At that time, **Antarctic blue whales** remained at a few percent of their pre-exploitation size although they were thankfully increasing at around 7% per year. The Committee is now examining whether it will be possible to assess populations separately. An important contributor to the Committee's work on this species is the Southern Ocean Research Partnership's (SORP's) [Antarctic Blue Whale Project](#). The Committee also received papers on Chilean blue whales and pygmy blue whales off Australia.

Special attention was paid again this year to **gray whales in the western North Pacific**, whose feeding grounds coincide with major oil and gas operations off Sakhalin Island, Russian Federation. The population numbers only about 140 animals. A [satellite telemetry programme](#) undertaken for two years under the auspices of the IWC has found that all four whales for which the tags lasted unexpectedly moved across to the eastern Pacific; the tag lasted long enough on one animal for it to be tracked to the Mexican breeding grounds and then back to Sakhalin. Another programme under the auspices of the IWC found 14 matches between Mexico and Sakhalin Island. This international collaboration to examine stock structure and investigate conservation implications is continuing. The Committee has great concern over the possible threats to this population from oil and gas activities. It recommended that all companies implement appropriate monitoring and mitigation plans. The Committee welcomed the efforts of Japan to reduce bycatch mortality of gray whales in its waters. Finally, the Committee acknowledged the important work of the IUCN Western Gray Whale Advisory Panel and recommended continuation of the Panel beyond 2011.

The Committee held a [workshop](#) in Buenos Aires in September 2011 on **Southern Hemisphere right whales**. The Committee reviewed the report and endorsed a number of science and conservation-related matters, especially related to the importance of continued long-term monitoring and the provision of data on ship strikes and entanglements. The issue of Conservation Management Plans for two stocks will come later in the Commission's deliberations.

Ship strikes and entanglements are a threat to the endangered **western North Atlantic right whale** population which numbers around 400 animals. Five deaths and eleven entanglement cases were reported off the US coast between November 2009 and October 2010. The Committee again expressed grave concern over this and other small stocks.

One poorly understood area is the eastern North Pacific. The IWC has developed a research programme called **IWC-POWER** (North Pacific Ocean Whale and Ecosystem Research) and is now in the third year of the initial phase of the programme (see [SC/64/Rep1](#)). An IWC-designed survey with international researchers will be undertaking a 60-day research cruise with the generous donation of a vessel by Japan. The cruise will focus on systematic sightings, biopsy sampling and photo-identification work.

That completed the first part of the Scientific Committee's report to the Commission. The Commission endorsed those parts of the report and its recommendations.

A major part of the Commission's work this year (Item 7) is the renewal of **aboriginal subsistence whaling (ASW) quotas** for the hunts undertaken by the USA (bowhead and gray whales), Russian Federation (gray and bowhead whales), Denmark/Greenland (common minke, fin, humpback and bowhead whales) and St Vincent and The Grenadines (humpback whales). The present limits can be found [here](#). Yesterday afternoon, the Commission received the [report](#) of its Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling Sub-Committee. In determining ASW limits, the Commission via this sub-committee, initially, receives the report of the Scientific Committee on the sustainability of proposed catches and the statements of 'need' from the countries with such hunts explaining their cultural, nutritional and subsistence needs. It is on this basis, the Commission sets limits. The ASW sub-committee received and endorsed the Scientific Committee's report on the status of these stocks, noting that the Committee had stated that all of the proposed hunts (see [IWC/64/10](#) and [IWC/64/12](#)) were acceptable from a conservation standpoint. The primary discussions in the ASW sub-committee

concerned the need statements for the Greenland hunts and the hunt by St Vincent and The Grenadines. Discussions of the proposals are continuing and the Commission will hear from the countries proposing limits on the morning of the second day.