Resolution 2016-3

Resolution on Cetaceans and Their Contributions to Ecosystem Functioning

ACKNOWLEDGING that cetaceans make significant contributions to ecosystem functioning that are beneficial for the natural environment and people;

RECOGNISING the need to integrate the values of biodiversity and the contributions made by cetaceans to ecosystem functioning into decision-making processes related to the conservation and management of cetacean populations;

FURTHER RECOGNISING the ever increasing understanding of the value of cetaceans from a social, economic and ecological perspective;

ALSO FURTHER RECOGNISING that the Commission has identified the importance of research on the effects of environmental changes on cetaceans due to increasing threats faced by cetaceans, including climate change, pollution, ship strikes, and entanglement among others;

AWARE that increasing scientific evidence suggests that whales enhance ecosystem productivity by concentrating nitrogen and iron near the surface through the release of faecal plumes, in some cases equivalent to that required to support localised prey consumption, such as has been reported for blue whales, sperm whales and humpback whales among others;

a) **CONSIDERING** that, because of their large size, live whales represent an important store of carbon while their carcasses efficiently export carbon from the surface waters to the deep sea. These carcasses also serve as important feeding opportunities for a variety of deep sea species, many of which are exclusively found on such "whale falls", thus creating small but significant ecosystems on their own and contributing to biodiversity in great depths;

ALSO CONSIDERING that iron defecated by whales may contribute to the stimulation of carbon export into the Southern Ocean and thus whales may play a role in regulating atmospheric CO_2 levels;

RECALLING Resolution 2001-9, which acknowledged that better understanding of marine ecosystems would contribute to the conservation and management of living marine resources, and prioritised the study of interactions between whales and fish stocks; and

NOTING the wide collaboration of the IWC with other international governmental conventions and organisations.

NOW THEREFORE THE COMMISSION:

ACKNOWLEDGES increasing scientific data suggesting that whales enhance nutrient availability for primary production;

RECOGNISES the need to include consideration of the contributions made by live cetaceans and carcasses present in the ocean to marine ecosystem functioning in conservation, management strategies and decision making;

ENCOURAGES Contracting Governments to work constructively towards integrating considerations related to the role played by live cetaceans in regulating and supporting ecosystem functioning, in future decisions, agreements and resolutions;

RESOLVES to review the ecological, management, environmental, social and economical aspects related to the contributions of cetaceans to ecosystem functioning to people and natural systems, as a matter of importance;

DIRECTS the Conservation Committee to undertake the review previously identified and directs the Conservation and Scientific Committees to further incorporate the contribution made by live cetaceans to ecosystem functioning into their work;

ASKS the Scientific Committee to screen the existing research studies on the contribution of cetaceans to ecosystem functioning, to develop a gap analysis regarding research and to develop a plan for remaining research needs; and

DECIDES to increase collaboration and co-operation with governmental and non-governmental, regional, and international organisations to work on the contributions made by live cetaceans to ecosystem functioning issues, including the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations, and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, among others.