

Pro-whaling nations threaten the demise of the IWC by pushing to resume commercial whaling

Zurich / Portorož, Slovenia, 13th October 2022. As the 68th meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) is set to begin in Portorož, Slovenia, on Monday, 17th October 2022, pro-whaling nations are seeking to force the IWC to resume negotiations on the resumption of commercial whaling. This is happening at a time when the IWC is in a difficult financial situation and urgently needs to have its budget for the next few years agreed. In a key strategic move, Antigua and Barbuda seems to be exploiting this crisis by linking the approval to the budget to a resolution on commercial whaling. The situation is even more absurd, given the fact that Antigua and Barbuda has not paid its membership fees for three years.

The IWC is in dire financial troubles also because a number of member states have not paid their annual membership fees – in some cases for years. If the upcoming Commission meeting does not agree on a new budget then the very existence of the IWC is in jeopardy. If the IWC falls then this would effectively end the moratorium on commercial whaling, which has been in place since 1986.

Whilst the last IWC in Brazil in 2018 adopted the so-called Florianópolis Declaration as a guidance towards a clear conservation-oriented future of the IWC, now the pro-whaling countries want to take advantage of this existential threat to the IWC to turn the clock backwards.

“Efforts to block agreement on the budget or use this situation to facilitate a return to the dark times of commercial whaling is an appalling situation” says Nicolas Entrup, Director International Relations at OceanCare. He notes that there will be three provocative proposals by – or supported by - Antigua and Barbuda in front of the Commission: to allow voting rights to members that have not paid their membership; a proposed resolution to re-open a formal debate on the resumption of commercial whaling; and a co-sponsored resolution on food security – a flimsy argument that whaling could contribute to global food security and address poverty. All these proposals need to be effectively rejected.

“We urge the IWC not to set a dangerous precedent by granting voting rights to countries that are ‘in arrears’ (i.e. have not paid their membership fees)” says Fabienne McLellan, Managing Director of OceanCare. “It is simply impudent that some countries – especially those who have not paid their membership fees for many years - want to change the rules in order to force the IWC towards a resumption of commercial whaling.” She adds that OceanCare also totally rejects the resolution brought forward on commercial whaling as there is simply no reason to restart talks about commercial whaling at this point.

Another resolution brought forward by some nations concerns “food security”. However, food insecurity is indeed an existential problem, but an IWC-resolution on “food security” is misplaced and can only be seen as a distraction, because the IWC is not at all the forum for such a debate. It is the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) which is the responsible forum for global food policies.

Whilst OceanCare sees no necessity to fall for the backward-looking arguments and strategies of a handful of countries, the organisation sees the urgent need for the IWC to continue and expand its important conservation work including through its Scientific and Conservation Committees.

“The IWC must not deviate from the path set out by the Parties at the last meeting in 2018 in Brazil, which is to maintain the moratorium and to focus on addressing the core conservation challenges to protect whale populations” adds McLellan, referring to the “Florianópolis Declaration”.

Attached:

“2018 Florianópolis Declaration”, adopted at the 2018 IWC in Brazil which urges the IWC to maintain the whaling moratorium and focus on conservation issues



50-year vision for the IWC: a document that is supported by OceanCare and NGOs from all across the world

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/eoqbblzxxqytoxqsejm4n/h?dl=0&rlkey=xrl82ldprwdm8w9m1k3ryynp>

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Background information

The International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW) was negotiated by 15 countries in 1946 and entered in force in 1948. Today, there are 88 member states to the International Whaling Commission, the body which executes the convention. In 1982, after decades of intensive industrial whaling, the IWC decided to ban commercial whaling. This so-called moratorium, probably the greatest achievement in international species conservation, entered into force in 1986, saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of whales, but is currently rejected by Norway, Iceland and Russia.

About OceanCare

OceanCare has been working for marine wildlife and ocean protection since 1989. In July 2011 the organisation has been granted Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. OceanCare has been an observer at the IWC since 1992 and is very familiar with the people and rules within this forum. OceanCare published studies on the health risks associated with cetacean meat consumption, thereby initiating cooperation between the IWC and the WHO. We stirred debate on Japanese vote buying, which led to a ban on so-called incentive gifts ("fisheries aid"), and worked to improve civil society participation within the IWC by defining clear rights and duties of NGOs. Further, OceanCare is represented in the IWC Scientific Committee since 2015. This year in Slovenia, OceanCare will once again strive to achieve optimum protection for cetaceans. www.oceancare.org