

Despite a dramatic showdown the IWC keeps the moratorium in place and takes a timid step forward towards a more conservation agenda

Portoroz, Slovenia, 21st October 2022 - The IWC saw a tense showdown between conservation-oriented countries and pro-whaling nations, at the plenary session, when a vote on a whale sanctuary in the south Atlantic was prevented by 17 pro-whaling nations walking out of the plenary session. South American countries and several other members expressed their dismay at this diplomatic affront. “OceanCare fully regrets that pro whaling nations blocked the meeting by not returning to the conference room, thus preventing a vote on the sanctuary to happen. It is fair to call this a diplomatic scandal and blackmailing Members of an international treaty” says Fabienne McLellan, Managing Director of OceanCare.

However, the whaling nations also suffered defeat and were forced to withdraw their two controversial proposals, that to lift the moratorium and that on food security, when it became clear that they would lose a vote.

“Working towards eradicating hunger is an utmost urgency for the global community but thinking that whaling could contribute anything to achieving this objective is nothing but foolish. The withdrawal of the Resolution is a consistent move, but everyone can be assured that the pro whaling camp will keep building on further fabricating this narrative and bring it back at the next meeting”, says Nicolas Entrup, Director International Relations of OceanCare.

He adds: “It’s a great that the initiative to lift the moratorium on commercial whaling has also been withdrawn, so the ban on commercial whaling is defended. But this does not mean the threat is gone. We are concerned pro whaling nations will continue and bring it at the next IWC meeting, as it is part of a strategy to keep the IWC away from concentrating on developing and implementing conservation action”

In a further positive development, the fourth resolution, on plastic pollution, was adopted by consensus, which is welcomed by OceanCare: “A better understanding, and also better action to help whales and dolphins surviving in a marine world infiltrated by massive plastic pollution. That’s the main objective decided by the IWC today” says Fabienne McLellan, Managing Director of OceanCare.

“Overall a mixed outcome” says Nicolas Entrup, “Despite desperate and scandalous tactics by pro-whaling nations, clearly directed by Japan, the IWC did manage a small step forward towards a more conservation oriented organization, and – most importantly – kept the moratorium on commercial whaling in place.”

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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