
2004: IWC56 in Sorrento, Italy

JULY 19, 2004 - DAY 1

Today was the opening day, and AWI attended, presented our opening statement, and distributed the current AWI Quarterly, pointing out the Sakhalin and acoustic committee articles. In the meeting, the first thing that Japan did was try to get all the 'conservation' items taken off the agenda (including whale killing methods and associated welfare issues; some sanctuary items; environmental and health issues; whale watching; small cetaceans; and the conservation committee). This went back and forth with the usual countries going predictable ways, and finally Japan withdrew the proposal and the agenda was adopted.

Next came the Secret Ballot agenda item whereby Japan proposed an amendment to the Rule of Procedure E.3(d), essentially trying to get voting by secret ballot allowed. The reason behind this is that the Japanese "puppet countries" do not feel intimidated when they vote against the like-minded countries. Japan tries this every year and has not succeeded to date. This was the first vote of the week and was awaited with trepidation by all as it would provide an indication of the way future voting might go later in the week. There are 57 countries at this year's meeting with four countries not having paid their dues so unable to vote. We knew that it was going to be close, and the final vote on the adoption of the Japanese proposal was 24 in favor to 29 against, a narrow win for continued transparency in IWC voting. Denmark, an aboriginal subsistence whaling nation, was a swing vote. Two of the four countries who have yet to pay are apparently in the process of paying, and they are seen as Japan puppets, so once allowed to vote, the majority is very, very slim.

The next item on the agenda was whale stocks with a partial report from the Scientific Committee. Of particular interest to AWI was the report about the Western Gray Whales off Sakhalin Island in Russia and the threat to them from oil and gas exploration [an issue we raised in our [Summer 2004 AWI Quarterly](#) (Vol. 53, No. 3)]. The Committee reported their 'great concern' over the compelling evidence that this population is in 'serious danger of extinction' and recommended 'as a matter of absolute urgency that measures be taken' to protect the whales. The Committee also 'strongly recommended that all range states (Japan, Korea, Russia and China) develop or expand national monitoring and research programs on the Western Gray Whales. The report of the Scientific Committee was further strengthened by a resolution sponsored by the UK, South Africa, Belgium and Germany calling for the Secretariat of the IWC to offer its services and scientific expertise to the oil and gas organizations, to make every effort to actively participate and provide advice and expertise at any international expert panels convened to consider the impacts on the whales from the oil and gas projects in the area, and also called for the IWC to request that all range states to develop or continue scientific research on the whales. There was some argument on the resolution from Japan and Russian Federation, with Japan claiming that the sponsors did not consult with the range states and the Russian Federation arguing over the wording. The UK and Russia have agreed to work on the wording and the resolution will be the first order of business tomorrow. Also on the agenda for tomorrow is aboriginal subsistence whaling, the revised management scheme, whale killing methods and associated welfare issues, sanctuaries, socio-economic implications and small-type whaling, environmental and health issues. If today's course of events is any indication, we will be lucky to get through about a quarter of the scheduled items.

The Commissioners are now meeting in a closed door session, and it is our understanding that they will be discussing, among other things, NGOs. This comes in light of a recent report on vote buying by Japan that was put together by several NGOs, including IFAW and WDCS and released to the press yesterday. A British newspaper has picked up the story, which can be found at <https://www.independent.co.uk/environment/harpooned-the-worlds-fight-to-save-the-whale-553619.html> (<https://www.independent.co.uk/environment/harpooned-the-worlds-fight-to-save-the-whale-553619.html>).

Prior to the meeting, on Sunday afternoon, AWI attended a meeting with the US delegation to the IWC, along with other US-based NGOs. Included on the US delegation is Dr. William T. Hogarth, Assistant Administrator for Fisheries at the National Marine Fisheries Service. At that meeting, AWI asked Dr. Hogarth whether the US delegation was planning to address the issue of vote buying. The response was that the US was not and that vote buying was not something that can be legally proved. AWI later attended a three-hour long meeting with almost 100 other NGO groups where we announced our concerns over the marine noise issue, gave a short summation of the main points and invited other NGO groups to get involved with us. Subsequently several NGO groups from all over the world have approached AWI expressing interest, and it is our intention to form a strong coalition to tackle the marine noise issue with a united front. Our first meeting is scheduled for Wednesday evening, July 21.

JULY 20, 2004 - DAY 2

Day two opened with the Western Gray Whale resolution left over from the previous evening. The UK announced that they had agreed to some word changes with the Russian Federation, Iceland and the Chair of the Scientific Committee. Despite further concerns expressed by several nations including Russia, Iceland, Norway, Japan, Korea and Norway, the amended resolution passed by consensus. The UK government issued a press release to announce their victory, the full text of which can be found at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/> (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/>).

Agenda Item 5, Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling opened with a report from the Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling Sub-Committee. This Sub-committee met July 14, with AWI in attendance. The report included a discussion on the development of the Strike Limit Algorithm for Eastern North Pacific Gray Whales, whereby the hunt is assessed by the Scientific Committee in terms of need against threats to the populations and future needs. The report continued with a report on Greenlandic Fisheries. The reported Greenland catch data for 2003 included a total of 207 fin and minke whales. Of these, 10 were struck and lost. The UK brought up their concerns over the high numbers of females reported in the catch reports and their concern for future populations. Other countries agreed including New Zealand and Germany. The discussions continued with Denmark defending their poor record on genetic sampling of their catch and the US having to defend their research on the Bowhead Whale stocks. Eventually the report was accepted with objections noted.

Next came the Schedule 13 Amendment proposed by Russia and discussed in some length during the Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling Sub-committee meeting. This Schedule deals with Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling catch limits for specified whales. The proposed change that caused the most controversy was the Russian request to remove the wording relating to aboriginal subsistence and cultural needs. This change is seen as providing a loosening of the subsistence language. The UK announced that it had reservations about the proposed changes, noted that the need issue was addressed in other parts of the Schedule, but said that they would not halt the process of the proposal going ahead. The proposal was adopted by consensus.

The rest of the day was devoted to Agenda Item 6, the Revised Management Scheme (RMS), which AWI does not support in any form, as we believe it opens the door to the resumption of widespread commercial whaling. Essentially little headway was made during the meeting, with much posturing from all sides. The debate included a proposal from Norway calling for a revision to the Revised Management Procedure, which after much debate remained unresolved. Similarly a Chairman's proposal for a revision to the RMS met with arguments for and against from both sides. Eventually, it was agreed that the issue would be discussed inter-seasonally before the next IWC meeting in 2005 in Korea. Of concern to AWI is that most nations appear to accept that an RMS will come, with none actually stating that they were completely opposed to it. Germany, Brazil and New Zealand were the only nations who spoke up strongly against the RMS. Germany expressed concerns over the animal welfare issues and Brazil cautioning of the potential abuses that already occur. AWI was pleased with the remarks from the New Zealand Commissioner who stated that he was prepared to discuss and negotiate the proposal, but that he found it to be 'fundamentally flawed for many reasons'. He also stated that the current practice of scientific whaling is a fraud. He echoed similar comments during a press interview.

JULY 21, 2004 - DAY 3

The very full day three opened with Agenda Item 7, Whale Killing Methods and Associated Welfare Issues. New Zealand began the proceedings with the introduction of a resolution on whale killing issues promoting more humane killing of whales. The usual back and forth between the pro- and anti-whaling nations ensued. Japan took issue with the lack of reference to a workshop in which they had been a participant regarding the whale killing methods, and resulted in Austria offering to add a paragraph to reflect the work of the workshop. Later a vote was held on the amended resolution and was successful.

Agenda Item 8, Sanctuaries was next discussed in length, with the Southern Ocean Sanctuary (SOS) up for review, and two schedules for the establishment of South Pacific Sanctuary (SPS) and South Atlantic Sanctuary (SAS). Japan presented a proposal to abolish the SOS altogether and introduce the whaling of almost 3,000 minke whales for a specified Antarctic sector. The proposal was eventually put to a vote after much debate and AWI is pleased to report that the proposal was defeated. Next came a report from the Scientific Committee on Improvements to the Sanctuary Review Process. The report was adopted without comment. Next came a proposal from Australia and New Zealand on the establishment of the SPS, followed by the proposal from Brazil and Argentina to establish the SAS. Both proposals went to a vote and both passed, but neither received the 3/4 majority required.

The next Agenda Item was 9, Socio-economic Implications and Small Type Whaling. Japan introduced a resolution on Japanese Community-Based Whaling proposing the IWC act to "alleviate the distress caused by the cessation of minke whaling to the communities of Abashiri, Ayukawa, Wadoura, and Taiji." We see this as a typical attempt by the Japanese to progress their plan to overturn the moratorium and take a step toward commercial whaling. Sadly we report that after significant debate with no resolution, the US commissioner put forward a suggestion to change the wording slightly to "alleviate the continued difficulties caused by the cessation of minke whaling..." AWI is appalled that the US would enter into any type of deal-brokering with Japan over such an important issue. Unfortunately the amended resolution passed by consensus. A further resolution by Japan to amend the schedule for the killing of Bryde's Whales from the Western stock of the North Pacific failed when it was put to a vote.

The next item on the Agenda had been eagerly awaited by AWI, Environmental and Health Issues, which considers environmental effects on marine mammals. The Chairman of the Scientific Committee gave a brief summary of the Scientific Committee's work with regard to pollution and reported on concerns ranging from organochlorines, heavy metals and radionuclides in bowhead whales, to oil-born aromatic hydrocarbons in the seas off Gabon, a site of intensive oil and gas exploration. The Chairman reported on the results of a mini symposium on human caused noise held during the Scientific Committee meetings. Invited experts had been asked to present on a variety of noise-related issues from marine acoustics to marine mammal hearing mechanisms. AWI was very pleased with the outcome of the mini-symposium. The Scientific Committee agreed that "there is now compelling evidence implicating military sonar as a direct impact on beaked whales in particular." The Committee also agreed that "evidence of increased sounds from other sources, including ships and seismic activity were cause for serious concern." This is tremendous news and gives us some powerful ammunition when we oppose seismic activities and comes just ahead of the next round of Marine Mammal Commission Acoustic Committee meetings. We know that these findings will be on the agenda when the committee meets in San Francisco next week , and AWI will be in attendance to witness the proceedings and make public comment.

Immediately following the adoption of the Science Committee report on environmental issues, the IWC broke for dinner, and AWI hosted a meeting with other groups concerned with noise in the marine environment. This inaugural meeting, attended by representatives from all over the world was held with a view to sharing information and establishing a communication network on ocean noise.

On returning to the IWC plenary meeting, a discussion opened about whale watching with some members making statements about the profitability of the industry in their respective countries. Japan recognized whale watching but stated that it is outside the remit of the IWC. Other issues that ran well into the night included permits, contributions and other Scientific Committee Report items, which were eventually agreed upon. At one point the Chair announced that he had a statement to make regarding non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The statement read that the Commission is concerned about the circulation of unsubstantiated material regarding certain members. The Chair announced that the Commission plans to introduce a Code of Conduct with respect to NGO behavior which if violated, could result in expulsion from meetings. This move is in response to a press release put out the day before the meeting began about vote buying by the Japanese. Japan had objected to the release . AWI and other NGOs believe that the press release contents should not be bound by the rules of the IWC and that Japan's complaint was spurious and should not have resulted in such a measure. The Code of Conduct will come into effect at the next IWC meeting in 2005. Members may remember that Japan took issue with NGO activities at last year's meeting complaining about a cartoon about vote buying - with the NGOs being requested to apologize. After an exhausting day, the meeting finally ended at 1am.

JULY 22, 2004 - DAY 4

The final day commenced with a presentation by Japan on sustainable use whereby they again explained the notion of killing just enough whales so as not to endanger populations. Their presentation was noted. Next came the report from the Infractions Sub-committee, whereby nations report contraventions with IWC rules. AWI had attended this Sub-committee meeting where the nations reported violations including the killing of two Bowhead whales by the US. The report was accepted. Next followed Agenda Item 16, Catches by Member Nations. The total number of reported catches for the 2003 and 2003/2004 seasons was 1,775 whales, of which 28 were struck and lost. Japan reportedly took the most whales (704),

followed by Norway (647). Minke whales were the most commonly caught whale (1,482). The next Agenda Item was the election of the next Vice-Chair, a position that will be held for three years with the likely eventual promotion to Chair. The US nominated the South African commissioner who also chaired the Conservation Committee at the 56th IWC. The Russian Federation nominated the Japanese commissioner and a substantial debate ensued. Eventually the South African commissioner was elected by secret ballot, 26 votes to 25, with 2 abstentions. The next Agenda Item, which took over two hours to resolve, was the decision on the venue of the 2006 IWC meeting, with France vying with St. Kitts and Nevis for the honor. Both countries presented proposals on the benefits of each country, with St. Kitts and Nevis being the ultimate winner. The day was winding down, with a return to the debate over the RMS still ahead. The Conservation Committee report was accepted with noted objections from Dominica and Japan; these delegations objected to the committee's existence and requested a change of name to incorporate sustainable use. Finally the Commission came back to the RMS with New Zealand reporting on the product of the small working group who had met since Tuesday to rework the language of the original resolution proposed by Denmark, Ireland, Iceland, Korea, Japan, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and USA. After challenges to the wording, and yet more lengthy debate, a compromise was reached with the final amended resolution being an agreement to re-establish the working group on the Revised Management Scheme (RMS) with a view to holding an intercessional meeting prior to the 57th IWC, and an agreement to proceed expeditiously towards the completion of both the drafting of text and technical details according to an Intercessional Plan of Work that had been developed. The aim was to have results ready for consideration and possible adoption at IWC/57. AWI is very concerned about what appears to be the widespread resignation by many anti-whaling nations to adopt the RMS, which we see as a mechanism to reintroduce commercial whaling. Pro-whaling nations have been pushing for the rapid adoption of the RMS for many years, with the anti-whaling nations generally trying to stall the process. This year, unfortunately, the process moved a little further along, but has essentially been put off again until next year. Other administrative matters followed and final comments were provided and the meeting was then officially closed at 4pm.
