
2007: IWC59 in Anchorage, Alaska

MAY 29, 2007 - DAY 1

To kick off the proceedings of the 59th annual International Whaling Committee (IWC) meeting, AWI hosted a “Save the Whales Again!” VIP Reception before the plenary session on Sunday evening. Campaign spokespersons including actor Hayden Panettiere of NBC's *Heroes* fame, MTV's Stephen Colletti and top Australian Surfer Dave Rastovich attended. The event culminated in the screening of *Whaledreamers*, a film that documents Australian aboriginals and other natives from around the world who revere whales in their culture. The film was co-produced by “Save the Whales Again!” partner Jeff Pantukhoff of the Whaleman Foundation.

Leading up to the meeting, AWI supported a human whale migration project organized by Leslie Morava and aerial artist John Quigley. Thousands of schoolchildren participated in the project, which originated in Baja, Mexico and traveled through five locations before culminating in Anchorage, Alaska, after taking part in educational programs about marine conservation. Each child was invited to decorate postcards to express their feelings about whales and their habitat. The postcards were then hand carried along the migration route to the IWC meeting.

AWI and the Whaleman Foundation, along with Hayden, Stephen and other “Save the Whales Again!” spokespersons, held a press conference on the opening day of the IWC meeting. Susan Millward introduced the event by highlighting AWI's role in the “Save the Whales” movement of the 1970s and 1980s, displaying public service announcements by Katherine Hepburn and Gregory Peck. Susan explained how their message has endured over the years and how their efforts are being taken up by younger generations now defending whales and the moratorium on commercial whaling.

Hayden, her younger brother Jansen Panettiere, and Stephen – who was born in the same year that the moratorium came into effect – spoke about their personal relationships with cetaceans and the need to educate younger people about the threats these animals face. Dave Rastovich, who represents Surfers for Cetaceans with Howie Cook, spoke up for the small cetaceans they regularly encounter while surfing – and who are largely neglected by the IWC. NYPD Blue actor Esai Morales spoke with passion about the inherent cruelty of whaling. John Quigley and Leslie presented the thousands of postcards from the human migrating whale project. The press conference was rounded out by a presentation from Australia's Teens Against Whaling (led by Ayesha Future, Skye Bortoli and Caitlin Bortoli), who spent the past year collecting 50,000 signatures against the commercial whaling of humpback whales. Earlier, the teens presented the signatures to IWC Chair William Hogarth.

Representatives of AWI dashed to the opening session of the IWC meeting after wrapping up the press conference. There, they witnessed an impassioned speech from Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska, followed by a routine by Native American dancers to welcome in the meeting. Opening statements by new member countries were presented, including Ecuador and Laos. The IWC membership was announced to stand at 76 countries, with several countries recorded as not having voting rights because of credential issues. Fortunately, the balance currently leans toward the conservation-minded countries.

The rest of the day was spent discussing stock assessment reports from the IWC scientific committee, which had met prior to the meeting. Whale killing methods were also brought up, and significantly, several whaling countries announced that they would not provide time to death data to the IWC, but instead to other forums – namely the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission. Later, the US government hosted an evening reception at the Alaska Heritage Center, where delegates were entertained by Native dancers from Chutotka, Russia, Alaskan Natives, and members of the Makah Tribe.

Animal Welfare Institute Positions on Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling Issues at IWC59 Full PDF
(https://awionline.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/AWI_BriefingPaper-Makah.pdf)

Animal Welfare Institute Positions on Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling Issues at IWC59 Summary

Paragraph 13 of the Schedule to the Convention allows for whaling by aboriginals for subsistence purposes. Native peoples in Greenland, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the Russian Federation and the United States currently engage in aboriginal subsistence whaling.

Greenland is a self-governed territory of Denmark and native Greenlanders hunt minke, bowhead, fin whales as well as other marine mammals for subsistence purposes. The current quota for West Greenland for the years 2008-2012 is 2 bowhead whales, 19 fin whales and 200 minke whales and an additional 12 minke whales for East Greenland. At the 2008 IWC meetings, Greenland once again made a request for a quota of 10 humpback whales but the request was denied. Since whaling records began, 3,381 whales have been reported as struck and landed by Greenland natives.

Native Bequians of St. Vincent and the Grenadines are currently issued a quota of humpback whales by the IWC for subsistence purposes. Natives of this country have also been known to hunt sperm whales in the past. The current quota is 20 animals over a five-year period ending in 2012, and 24 whales have been killed by the Bequians since 1986.

The Chukotka people of the Russian Federation traditionally hunt gray whales and bowhead whales. The IWC issues quotas for bowhead and gray whales, which the Chukotka natives share with the Alaskan natives of the United States and the Makah tribe of Washington state, respectively. Since record keeping began, 13 bowhead and 2,646 gray whales have been struck and landed by Russian natives. The current quotas for bowhead and gray whales landed are 280 and 620, respectively, over the five-year period ending in 2012.

The United States is a whaling nation, by virtue of the Alaskan natives who have hunted whales and other marine mammals for subsistence purposes for millennia. The Alaskan native peoples hunt bowhead whales by the use of an IWC quota that is shared by the Chukotka people of the Russian Federation. The Alaskan natives have also hunted gray whales in the past although they do not share the quota of gray whales assigned by the IWC. Alaskan natives have struck and landed 1070 of bowhead whales.

The Makah Tribe of Neah Bay, Washington state was formerly a whaling tribe that ceased whaling for subsistence purposes in the 1920s. In 1996, the Makah tribe, citing a cultural need and an 1855 treaty right, succeeded in persuading the U.S. government to request that the IWC assign it a quota of gray whales. Through a controversial vote, the quota passed at the 1998 IWC meeting.

In May 1999, the Makah killed a juvenile gray whale. A lawsuit against NMFS for failure to comply with its National Environmental Policy Act responsibilities and filed in 1997 was finally won on appeal in 2000, and subsequent hunts were suspended. The Makah tribe has since requested a waiver of the take moratorium under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and NMFS is currently preparing the Environmental Impact Assessment that is required under the National Environmental Policy Act.

MAY 30, 2007 - DAY 2

The bulk of second day of the IWC meeting was spent discussing the much-anticipated aboriginal subsistence whaling quotas for native hunters in the United States, the Russian Federation, Denmark, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. These five-year quotas were last due for renewal in 2002, and at that time, the quota for bowhead whales hunted by Alaskan natives was blocked by the pro-whaling nations. The quota later passed at a special meeting, where the United States for the first time voted in favor of a resumption of Japanese small type coastal whaling. It was widely anticipated that a repeat of the 2002 meeting would occur.

However, the mood at the meeting was cordial, and after hearing the report of the chair of the Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling Sub-Committee, all quotas were renewed by consensus, except for the one for the natives of Greenland (a territory of Denmark). The quotas proposed and approved for the years 2008-2012 are as follows: 20 humpback whales for St. Vincent and the Grenadines Natives, 620 Eastern North Pacific gray whales for the Russian Federation Natives (and which the Washington State Makah Tribe wish to hunt), and 280 bowhead whales for the Alaskan and Russian Federation Natives. AWI is deeply troubled by the gray and bowhead whale quota proposals, which are explained in the brochure that we prepared ahead of the meeting to share with interested delegates. Denmark had requested a significant increase in the whales its natives wish to hunt—19 fin whales, 10 central stock minke whales, 200 West Greenland minke whales, 2 bowhead whales, and 10 humpback whales—and prompted considerable debate. Unsurprisingly, no consensus was reached because of the increase in the number of West Greenland minke whales and the addition of humpback and bowhead whales to the quota request. The item was tabled until day three.

After briefly discussing the Revised Management Scheme, the IWC moved on to the next agenda item—the future of the organization. The current polarization of its members has led many on both sides of the whaling debate to question where the IWC is headed and how it can work more effectively. To this end, Japan hosted a “normalization” meeting in February that was mainly attended by the pro-whaling IWC members. The meeting concluded that the IWC should be “normalized” to its origins, which led to the wholesale slaughter of the great whales and brought some species to the brink of extinction.

In April, a non-governmental organization hosted another meeting in New York to discuss the future of the IWC. This meeting concluded with various suggestions to break the impasse. However, AWI finds some of them troubling—namely, creating a southern hemisphere whale sanctuary, which could lead to the resumption of commercial whaling in the northern hemisphere, and revisiting the Revised Management Scheme, which would govern commercial whaling if the ban is lifted. This willingness to compromise is very troubling to AWI.

The chairs of both these meetings provided their reports. Argentina stated that a third meeting has taken place among Latin countries intercessionally and suggested that the resulting Buenos Aires Declaration highlighting the non-lethal use of whales should be also be considered by the IWC in its discussion on moving the organization forward. The outcome of the subsequent discussions was the possibility of another gathering between sessions to discuss the outcomes of all three meetings.

The final issue of the day was a discussion about a proposal by Brazil and Argentina to establish a whale sanctuary in the South Atlantic. The debate continued until the end of the session and was held over until day three.

MAY 31, 2007 - DAY 3

The third day was very long and ran late into the night. The Southern Atlantic Sanctuary proposal that had been held over from the previous day came up first. After further discussion, the proposed schedule amendment failed after a vote which required a three-fourth's majority. The next item was a proposal by Japan for a resumption of its Small Type Coastal Whaling for four Japanese towns. Japan has submitted similar proposals for the past two decades and this year had tailored its proposal to make it more palatable to the Commission. The proposal would involve a partial lifting of the moratorium on commercial whaling and would have significant ramifications for the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES). Japan tried to argue that there was a parallel with its proposal and the whaling conducted by Aboriginal Subsistence Whalers. Not surprisingly the proposal resulted in a protracted debate and the item being held over until day four.

AWI's Susan Millward and Mark Palmer of Earth Island Institute—a Save Japan Dolphin Coalition partner with AWI—held a brief press conference (<https://awionline.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/IWC59-Press-5-05-1240259901-11160.pdf>) during the lunch break. The press conference focused on the toxicity of Japanese small cetacean meat (https://awionline.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/IWC59-Mercury_FS_Japan_5-07-1240260177-11162.pdf). Mr. Ric O'Barry was slated to speak at the press about the groups' work to expose this dangerous threat to Japanese consumers, but he had been barred from entering the venue building so had to conduct his half of it outside. The reason for his exclusion was not provided but could be because of a silent and peaceful protest during the St. Kitts meeting last year.

The afternoon session started with a return to the Danish proposal for aboriginal subsistence whaling quotas. During the discussion, some compromise language was offered with the withdrawal of humpback whales from the quota, but consensus still could not be reached and the item was tabled for later. Next up was scientific permits with a discussion on the scientific committee's review of the Japanese Antarctic lethal "research". New Zealand proposed a resolution asking Japan to halt the lethal aspects of its research program. Several countries spoke of the research as unnecessary and poor science while the pro-whaling nations defended Japan's lethal research. The proposal ultimately went to a vote which passed by simple majority.

A lengthy discussion on Safety at Sea issues followed which included debate about the activities of certain NGOs in the Antarctic during Japan's last whaling season. The Commission generally agreed that certain actions relating to obstruction and violence at sea to other vessels was inappropriate, and though the death of a crew member of the Japanese whaling ship was incorrectly attributed to the NGO actions, a resolution on the matter was passed by consensus.

The late evening session was dominated by discussion on a non-lethal use of whales resolution introduced by Argentina and a slew of other conservation-minded countries. Despite Japan's attempts to get a recognition of the lethal use of whales inserted into the resolution, the resolution passed.

JUNE 1, 2007 - DAY 4

The final day opened early and was then immediately closed to observers so that a private commissioners meeting could convene. The meeting reopened a little later with a more decisive air and a renewed desire to move things along. Immediately Greenland's request for its increased aboriginal subsistence whaling quota was reopened and after some debate the issue was put to a vote and passed by 41 in favor, with 11 against and 16 abstentions. The meeting next revisited the issue of the future of the IWC and a decision to hold an intercessional meeting to further the discussion along.

Next the UK introduced a resolution on CITES—the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. The CITES meeting is taking place immediately after the IWC meeting, and with a proposal by Japan for status reviews of all the great whales which are currently listed on Appendix I of CITES because of the whaling moratorium, it was vital that the IWC make a statement against this proposal to CITES. The UK resolution was co-sponsored by 21 other member nations and urged CITES to respect IWC primacy on whale management, to reaffirm the moratorium on commercial whaling and to reject proposals to lift the ban on trade in whale products. Once again the pro-whaling countries spoke out against the resolution and the conservation-minded countries defended the resolution. It came down to a vote, the resolution passed with 37 votes in favor, four against and four abstentions. 27 pro-whaling countries refused to participate in the vote.

The UK also made a statement about Iceland's resumption of commercial whaling and there was general condemnation of Iceland among the conservation-minded countries. The UK stated that no resolution criticizing Iceland was proposed in fairness to the new Icelandic government, to give it an opportunity to cease commercial whaling on its own volition.

The next item on the agenda was the Scientific Committee report and the Chair of that body summarized the Committees discussions and conclusions. The alarming plight of the vaquita, a river dolphin that inhabits the waters of the upper California peninsula in Baja Mexico was discussed and compared to the baiji dolphin of China which was declared functionally extinct earlier in the year. The vaquita is a small cetacean and because of this, the pro-whaling nations restated their long held view that small cetaceans are outside the competency of the IWC. Nevertheless the resolution passed by consensus but not before the UK managed to criticize Japan over its Dall's porpoise hunt which has an annual kill rate of about 20,000 animals.

Ultimately the Scientific Committee report passed by consensus as did the infractions Committee report which followed. The rest of the day was spent discussing financial and administrative matters.

During the course of the afternoon the Chair tried a few times to bring up the small-type coastal whaling issue and each time Japan requested that it be tabled for later. With the day edging away, the issue finally came up within the last hour of the meeting. Japan had taken the proposed schedule amendment off the table and had replaced it with a resolution

proposal which called on the Commission to recognize the needs of the small-type coastal whaling towns, called on the scientific Committee to come up with a species specific review of the North Pacific minke whales and to consider approving an interim quota to their fishermen until the Committee has completed its review.

It was no surprise when all the pro-whaling nations and those that vote with Japan voiced approval for the resolution. The US stated that it appreciated Japan's efforts to make its small-type coastal whaling request more agreeable and appreciated the transparency with which Japan had conducted itself. Dr. DeMaster continued that the Scientific Committee will take from two to three years to conduct a species review, and that US could only support a resumption of Japanese small-type coastal whaling if it could be proved to be sustainable, could meet management objectives of the IWC and if was non-commercial.

With clearly not majority support for its proposal, Japan eventually withdrew the resolution proposal and stated that the lack of support exemplified the dysfunctional nature of the IWC and double standards within it. Japan then stated that because of the Commission's failure to support its "reasonable" request, it would be deliberating its membership of the organization and the possible establishment of a new body for the "sustainable management" of whales.

The final issue for the group was to decide the venue for the 2009 meeting. Portugal and Japan had both offered to host the meeting and each made a short presentation. Then the Mayor of Yokohama—the Japan offering—made a solemn announcement that since the Anchorage meeting had not produced a favorable result for Japan's small-type coastal whaling, Japan would withdraw its offer to host the meeting. With that the meeting ended with some wondering whether Japan will truly make good on its threat to leave the Commission. Next year's meeting will be held in Santiago, Chile.
