
2010: IWC62 in Agadir, Morocco

JUNE 20, 2010 - PRE-MEETING

The 62nd meeting of the International Whaling Commission is being held in Agadir, Morocco. This is potentially a pivotal meeting as the body is discussing its very future, a future that may include a return to sanctioned commercial whaling if some delegations have their way. AWI's Executive Director Susan Millward and Wildlife Biologist D.J. Schubert are at the meeting working to oppose efforts to weaken the moratorium, and to push for strengthening the moratorium and conservation of all the world's whales.

The week long plenary session which opens on Monday June 21, was preceded by a two-week scientific committee meeting and a week of sub-committee meetings and discussions on the future of the body. These "future" discussions are the product of a three-year process initiated after the 2007 IWC meeting to resolve a perceived impasse within the body. The IWC has long been divided over its remit—to protect whales or to manage whaling—with the body being split into almost equal sides, thanks in part to aggressive recruitment of countries into the body that support whaling. With major decisions requiring a $\frac{3}{4}$ majority vote to pass and some pro-whaling members refusing to participate in conservation initiatives of the Commission, the IWC has been hobbled by the inability to make substantive progress in recent years. AWI believes this dysfunction to be wholly manufactured by the pro-whaling factions to deliberately create division and facilitate capitulation by the conservation-minded members. The result: "future" discussions and a proposed compromise package developed by a handful of countries, including the US, over the course of almost a dozen closed-door meetings. The package was presented to the full body on April 22nd and the meeting in Agadir is the first opportunity for widespread discussion of its contents.

The IWC is more than the package however. Although meetings of the whale killing methods and infractions sub-committees were cancelled to make room for the future discussions, the work of the conservation committee and aboriginal subsistence whaling sub-committee were discussed. The conservation committee has been productive in working on the serious issues of ship strikes, whale watching, and country conservation plans, and its success demonstrates the type of work that could be achieved if the IWC could evolve into a true whale conservation body. The main focus of the aboriginal subsistence whaling sub-committee was to conduct the annual reviews of the status of the various whale stocks hunted by native populations from member nations.

After the sub-committee meetings, two days were spent on the future of the IWC discussions. After a presentation by the Chair, countries discussed the content of the package (proposed consensus decision) with no resolution. The plenary session which starts on Monday is eagerly and nervously awaited.

JUNE 21, 2010 - DAY 1

Day one of the plenary session saw the arrival of several ministers amid a flurry of activity from the media and security personnel. A few protest banners and signs were displayed outside the meeting venue and, despite a plethora of police, there was no disorderly behavior or unruly scenes. Hot topics for discussion amongst media and observers were news articles about the alleged payment by the government of Japan of the Chair's expenses and similar expenses for a dozen or more other IWC member nations. We have repeatedly called for the US to investigate these claims and make a commitment to act. We hold that the alleged dysfunction within the IWC has been artificially created by the pro-whaling nations, and that vote buying lies at the root of the problem.

The meeting opened, late as usual, with an opening ceremony of Moroccan musicians and dancers followed by a welcome to the latest IWC members to join the body—Ghana, the Dominican Republic and Bulgaria.

After announcing the list of countries whose voting rights were not in order for one reason or another, and a brief speech, the Chair closed the meeting for a day and a half to allow countries to discuss the continuation of the "future" discussions. An evening reception hosted by the government of Morocco was attended by delegates and observers and provided yet another opportunity for discussions about the fate of the body. Click here

(<http://www.awionline.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/IWC62-AWI-OpeningStatement.pdf>) to read AWI's opening statement.

JUNE 22, 2010 - DAY 2

With the Commissioners closeted in private meetings, the NGOs and press had to amuse themselves in the wings. Press conferences on Norwegian whaling, the welfare implications of whaling and the delivery of a million signature petition to Australia's Minister of the Environment, were held during the course of the day. NGO huddles abounded well into the night with rumors flying about the reconvening of the meeting tomorrow.

JUNE 23, 2010 - DAY 3

The anticipated opening of the third day after almost two days of private meetings was a little flat as the Chair announced that consensus on the package had not been reached. This means that right now the proposal to overturn the commercial whaling moratorium has been rejected. However the agenda item remains open, so everyone is on tenterhooks. Various interventions, including one by the US, expressed disappointment for the breakdown in process. More countries supported the idea of a cooling off period for a year. The failure of the group to reach a consensus clearly demonstrates the fundamental divisions within the body, ones that likely won't be resolved through internal discussions. AWI applauds the countries that stood by their principles and clearly articulated their opposition to the package. We are pleased that the moratorium remains intact although in the three years that this process has been ongoing upwards to 4,000 whales have been killed by Japan, Norway and Iceland. We do not believe that the solution to the IWC deadlock is to give in to the whalers' demands. The US delegation has told us that they will significantly reduce the level of involvement in the IWC in the future, that since this effort has failed, they will stop trying to mend the IWC. We cannot accept this and will continue beyond this meeting to call for renewed US leadership to conserve whales. Further, the voluminous conservation work

done by the IWC and discussed at this meeting should not be overshadowed by the collapse of the package. This body of work illustrates the tremendous achievements for whales that are possible when the IWC decides to really tackle the manufactured dysfunction that is hindering the body's evolution.

The meeting continued with reports on the status of whale stocks and the report of the Scientific Committee with respect to Antarctic minke whales, Southern Hemisphere humpback whales, Southern Hemisphere blue whales, Western North Pacific gray whales, Southern Hemisphere right whales, other stocks of right whales, and small stocks of bowhead whales, as well as research cruises undertaken by Scientific Committee scientists. Of particular interest was a call by the Scientific Committee for the postponement of a seismic survey due to take place directly in the feeding grounds of the critically endangered Western North Pacific gray whales of Sakhalin Island, in Russian Federation waters. Several countries, including the US, spoke up in support of the postponement.

The afternoon session commenced with a discussion on safety at sea with a presentation by Japan on the Southern Ocean clashes between Japanese whalers and anti-whaling protestors.

JUNE 24, 2010 - DAY 4

The fourth day opened with the Chair bringing attention to two documents that had been placed in pigeon holes the previous evening—a proposal from Denmark on behalf of its native whalers to add humpback whales to its annual quota, and a proposal by the US and Denmark to retain parts of the deal package relating to issuance of aboriginal subsistence whaling quotas through 2017. The latter, if successful would mean quotas on bowhead whales hunted by Alaskan and Russian Federation natives; gray whales hunted by Russian Federation natives; fin, minke and bowhead whales hunted by Greenland natives; and humpback whales hunted by St. Vincent and Grenadines natives and desired as hunting targets by Greenland natives.

From a US perspective, if successful, the proposal would remove the threat of the quota being used as leverage against the US in 2012, the next time it is up for renewal. The Danish document represents another controversial attempt by its Greenland natives to achieve IWC approval to add 10 humpback whales to its annual whale quotas in addition to the minke, fin and bowhead whales they already take. In our view there is not a sufficient subsistence need to warrant a quota for humpback whales.

A heated exchange took place over which agenda item the US/Denmark proposal should fall under, with the Japanese and others insisting it fall under the “future” agenda item that was still open, and conservation-minded nations adamant that the “future” item was closed to substantive changes.

Without resolution of the issue, the Chair moved on to other agenda items. These included the Revised Management Scheme (the rules that would govern commercial whaling if the moratorium were to be overturned); Sanctuaries; Small Type Coastal Whaling by Japanese coastal towns (which was left open at Japan's request); Special Permit Whaling, aka, Japan's scientific whaling (which was an unusually short discussion, during which Japan listed the number of papers, lectures and other examples of science achieved through its programs, and Australia countered by mentioning the

controversy surrounding the "science" of the programs); Environmental Concerns (which included reports on climate change, pollution, the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, and health implications of consuming cetacean meat); Conservation Management Plans (which included a discussion about conservation of small cetaceans); and Whale Watching.

Finally the Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling (ASW) agenda item came up and a report from the aboriginal subsistence whaling sub-committee was presented. Under the ASW Catch Limits agenda item, the Chair expressed his intention to include the US/Denmark proposal under that agenda item. A repeat of the morning's intense back and forth resulted with Japan restating its position that it had to be included under the "future" discussions and the conservation-minded nations, led by Argentina and other Latin nations, restating their position that the "future" item was effectively closed. A suggestion by the Chair to hold a private commissioners' meeting was rejected by the body with the US pleading to be heard under either agenda item. Eventually both Denmark and the US were permitted to make presentations to introduce their proposals and both did, taking up the bulk of the remainder of the day, with no discussions afterwards.

Finally the long day ended after 7 p.m. with NGO presentations—a bone thrown to civil society. Five pro-whale and three pro-whaling NGOs spoke. The pro-whale groups included NGOs from Norway, West Africa, the Caribbean, France and Japan and topics ranged on calls for better transparency, more civil society involvement, investigations into corruption allegations, and a call for better funded conservation programs.

With only one day to go and much to decide, observers were left wondering how the Chair was going to get it all done. The US NGOs met with the US delegation after the session, as it has been doing most days to discuss the day and the plans for the final day.

JUNE 25, 2010 - DAY 5

As is common at IWC meetings, the last meeting ended as rather a damp squib after the intense build up. After getting a few items out of the way, including the report of the Conservation Committee and the Scientific Committee Work Plan, attention turned to Item 6.3 and Denmark's proposal for a catch quota of humpback whales for its Greenland natives. The session opened with a statement by Spain on behalf of the European Union (EU) to propose an amendment to the Danish proposal. Spain suggested a reduction in the number of struck fin whales from 19 to 10 for the years 2010 through 2012 and a reduction in the proposed strike of humpback whales from 10 to 9 animals for the same period, with the aim of making the overall number of animals struck the same.

A long discussion followed with tweaks to the text by Denmark and the EU, support for the proposal from the pro-whaling nations and the US. There was wide opposition to the proposal by many Latin countries together with Monaco and India, mainly because of the lack of a demonstrated need and lack of consultation with range states. After a plea from the Chair for those countries in opposition not to break consensus, the proposal passed with consensus.

The next item was a report from the Financial and Administration committee. Significant among the debate that followed was the frequency of future meetings and an increase in the fees for NGOs in line with UK inflation rates.

Agenda item three, the future discussions, came next and the joint US/Denmark proposal to allow for all Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling quotas to extend to 2017. After a speech by the Mayor of the North Slope Borough in Alaska, Deputy Commissioner Dr. Doug DeMaster of the US thanked the Commission and withdrew the proposal because, he said, he knew that consensus could not be reached.

The Chair continued by introducing a statement on his perception of the way forward which, among other things, calls for countries to work together on initiatives that have not garnered general support and a reduction in Plenary discussions on contentious matters. Due to a lack of agreement about the document's content, it was eventually agreed that the statement would have to be a stand alone document of the Chair's recommendations, and not an agreed upon Commission document. Agenda item three was finally closed.

The discussion on the frequency of future meetings and separating the Scientific Committee from the meetings of the Commission was reopened with various suggestions from members. Finally in true IWC fashion, the decision was postponed to the next meeting.

The meeting closed with kind words for outgoing Secretariat Dr. Nicky Grandy.
