

2022: IWC68 in Portoroz, Slovenia



AWI'S OPENING STATEMENT

Since the International Whaling Commission last met in person in 2018, it has achieved two significant milestones: the 75th anniversary of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling in December 2021 and the 40th anniversary of the decision to prohibit commercial whaling worldwide (the moratorium) in July 2022. AWI and our colleagues in the conservation and animal protection community were proud to celebrate both landmarks and to launch a new Vision for the IWC (<https://iwc50yearvision.org/>) for its next 50 years.

Over seven decades, the IWC has evolved significantly from its narrow beginnings as a small, industry-serving organization that only dispensed commercial hunting quotas. It is now a highly respected global body with unique expertise and a well-established legal mandate to implement—and give advice to other intergovernmental organizations on—a full range of management, conservation and welfare measures affecting all cetaceans, not just the great whales.

Today, the IWC clearly has a mandate, purpose and portfolio of work that goes far beyond regulating whaling. But as cetaceans and their ecosystems face increasingly dire challenges, the IWC is lacking a vision to define its future. For the IWC to remain relevant and effective, it needs a vision for the next 50 years that reflects the urgency of mitigating the climate crisis, biodiversity loss and other anthropogenic threats to cetaceans and the marine environment.

It is the vision of AWI and more than 50 other conservation and animal protection organizations around the world for the **IWC to be at the center of global, regional and local efforts to ensure the full recovery and health of all cetacean populations, safeguard their welfare, and maximize their ecological contributions to healthy oceans.** This vision informs the following recommendations on specific issues on the agenda for IWC68:

- To date, most suggestions to balance the IWC's budget, including the **2023/24 Balanced Budget Proposal** (BSC/68/05/01) have mainly focused on spending cuts. We are therefore grateful to see that two of the three budget options include increasing assessed contributions. AWI strongly encourages the Commission to adopt an increase in

contributions that will stabilize the organization beyond a single budget cycle and enable it to meet its full potential. We also encourage individual Contracting Governments to look for opportunities to help the IWC raise revenue as well as save costs.

- AWI appreciates the efforts of the Working Group on Operational Effectiveness to develop alternative rules for voting rights in emergency situations in **Voting rights and Contracting Government Contributions at the International Whaling Commission** (FA/68/4.1.1/01). However, we urge the Commission not to support changing the rules of procedure to give the Commission *future* discretion to reinstate the right to vote of Contracting Governments in arrears. We also note that other intergovernmental organizations have mechanisms other than suspension of voting to penalize arrears and incentivize payment of assessed contributions.
- AWI strongly supports and urges the Commission to support the **Schedule Amendment to Create a South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary** (IWC/68/7.1/01). This protection for whales is long overdue and consistent with the IWC's 2018 Florianopolis Declaration on the Role of the International Whaling Commission in the Conservation and Management of Whales in the 21st Century (IWC2018-5).
- AWI opposes, and urges the Commission to reject, the **Resolution for the Implementation of a Conservation and Management Program for Whale Stocks aimed towards the lifting of the moratorium and the orderly Development of the Whaling Industry** (IWC/68/8.3/01). Returning to negotiations of the Revised Management Scheme (RMS) aimed at the resumption of commercial whaling defies the Commission's agreement in the Florianopolis Declaration in 2018 and would be a retrograde step in the evolution of the IWC. Furthermore, agreeing and then implementing a best practice RMS (and the associated Revised Management Procedure, RMP) is likely to cost several million pounds annually—an expense that is not contemplated in the IWC's proposed balanced budget for 2023/24 and which the whaling nations have not undertaken to assume.
- AWI strongly supports and urges the consensus adoption of **Resolution on Marine Plastic** (IWC/68/8.1/01). Plastic pollution is recognized as a major global threat to marine ecosystems and biodiversity; more than 12 million tonnes of plastic enter the oceans annually, posing severe conservation and animal welfare risks to whales. Given its expertise on this issue, the IWC has an important role to play and mandate to address plastic pollution impacts on cetaceans, in support of the recently adopted UN Environment Assembly Resolution (UNEP/EA.5/Res. 14), which calls for the development of an international, legally binding instrument on plastic pollution.
- AWI opposes, and urges the Commission to reject, the **Resolution on Food Security** (IWC/68/8.2/01). While recognizing that food insecurity poses a real threat for many around the world, long-lived, slow-to-reproduce whales are inherently unsuitable as a food source to address this issue, especially in light of the increasing threats they face. Most IWC member governments are already working to address the primary causes of marine food insecurity—climate change, IUU fishing, destructive fishing practices, and lack of strong regulations and enforcement thereof—in other fora such as the Food and Agriculture Organization.
- The Working Group on Operational Effectiveness has an important role in ensuring that the IWC's structure and working arrangements meet international best practice and are fit for purpose. But any changes should be informed by a clear vision of the IWC's role and its priorities and goals for the next 50 crucial years. AWI supports the **Budget Reform Strategy** (FA/68/4.1.2/01) and the proposed **IWC Strategic Principles and Terms of Reference for Working Group on Strategic Plan** (IWC/68/4.1.2/04). However, we continue to have concerns about specific elements of the **Governance Reform Proposals** (FA/68/4.1.2/02), including the creation of a Management Committee whose draft terms of reference do not clearly define “management issues” or explain its purpose and function in relation to animal welfare, whale watching and sanctuaries.

Following its 75th anniversary last year, the IWC's 68th meeting in 2022 provides the perfect opportunity for the Commission to define a clear 50-year vision that goes beyond managing whaling and establishes the IWC at the **center of global, regional and local efforts to ensure the full recovery and health of all cetacean populations, safeguard their welfare, and maximize their ecological contributions to healthy oceans**. AWI looks forward to working with governments who share this vision at IWC68 and in the future.

OCTOBER 17, 2022 - DAY 1

Day one of IWC68 began with a welcome address from the IWC chair, Andrej Bibic, the Slovenian minister of the environment and spatial planning, the state secretary from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the mayor of Piran. The ministers spoke to the importance of multilateral environmental agreements and the importance of the IWC not only for whales but also for ecosystems and biodiversity.

The first agenda item was whether to restore voting rights to contracting governments currently in arrears of their annual membership fee. The IWC decided by consensus to temporarily reinstate the right to vote for all contracting governments in arrears for 2020, 2021, and/or 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, 15 countries regained their voting rights for this meeting. Discussion on how the IWC should exercise such a discretion in exceptional circumstances in the future was deferred for intersessional consideration by the Working Group on Operational Effectiveness.

Currently, 48 countries have the right to vote. Five more will qualify to vote when their credentials for this meeting are accepted.

Most of the rest of the day consisted of presentations of four years' worth of meeting reports by the Scientific Committee, including its recommendations and future work plans. Three of these meetings were conducted virtually due to the pandemic, which presented challenges but also provided opportunities for many more scientists to participate. The chair expressed concerns about the impact of potential budget cuts on the work of the committee. Lastly, special thanks were given to Greg Donovan, the recently retired head of science, and Cherry Allison, former head of statistics, for their decades of service to the Scientific Committee.

Next, the chair of the Conservation Committee presented its work plan and recommendations. This included updates on the Bycatch Mitigation Initiative, the Whale Watching Handbook, and work to prevent ship strikes. The chair presented on a range of intersessional activities, including a joint Scientific/Conservation Committee workshop on climate change. Lastly, the Conservation Committee thanked Lorenzo Rojas-Bracho for his six years of service to the committee as chair and welcomed new chair Cat Bell and new vice chair Miguel Iñiguez.

The last, but certainly not least, item on the agenda was the report of the Working Group on Operational Effectiveness, which has worked for four years to develop proposals to improve IWC governance arrangements, including through a budget reform strategy. India spoke to the critical nature of the situation and supported the recommendations, while Antigua and Barbuda criticized the composition of the IWC Bureau.

OCTOBER 18, 2022 - DAY 2

Day two began with the chair of the Finance and Administration (F&A) Committee reporting on earlier discussions of administrative matters, including voluntary funds for assistance of governments with limited means. The Working Group on Operational Effectiveness (WGOE) then presented its proposals on budget reform, strategic principles of the IWC and structural reform. Some contracting governments sought more intersessional work on these matters, while others wanted substantial progress to be made at this meeting in order to adopt the proposals. The chair agreed that discussion should continue during plenary and held the agenda item open.

The F&A chair then reported on the previous day's endorsement of a proposal to temporarily restore voting rights to contracting governments currently in arrears for 2020, 2021, and/or 2022. No agreement was reached on defining what types of exceptional circumstances should trigger a future discretionary decision by the IWC to restore voting rights, and further intersessional work by the WGOE was agreed upon.

Next, the three proposed options for adopting a balanced budget were presented. The IWC is facing an increasingly critical financial situation resulting from years of deficit budgeting and declining income from member government fees.

A discussion about budget reform followed, with the United States, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Mexico speaking to the necessity of the IWC adopting a budget reform strategy. Palau and Antigua & Barbuda raised concerns about the cost implications of the proposed measures and responded to the proposed structural changes by suggesting a merger of the existing Conservation Committee with the newly proposed management committee to reduce costs. However, Chile, Costa Rica, and others raised concerns about the establishment of a management committee, suggesting the title "management" would reverse much of the progress made at the IWC over the years.

A closed session continued with the committee and budget discussions without NGOs present. Ultimately a proposed new committee structure was endorsed by Australia, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand, among others, but with the caveat that the terms of reference for the new committees be decided upon either during this plenary (Argentina's suggestion) or during the intersessional period once the committees are established (the United States' suggestion). In the following plenary session a number of animal protection and environmental NGOs NGOs, including AWI, expressed concern about the creation of a management committee, arguing that it would become the gateway to the resumption of commercial whaling and that it would be contrary to the Florianopolis Declaration adopted at the last in-person meeting in 2018, which reaffirmed the IWC's continued support for the whaling moratorium.

The final major point of contention relating to the WGOE was the proposed budget options for 2023 and 2024. Option 1 proposed only budget cuts, option 2 included a combination of budget cuts and annual contribution increases, while option 3 proposed increases in annual contributions sufficient to ensure no budget cuts had to be made. A decision on the budget was postponed following an exchange of views.

A number of contracting governments, including Brazil, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland, emphasized that they preferred option 3, which would increase contracting government contributions to keep pace with inflation after more than a decade in which contributions amounts have been frozen. However, in light of the current financial difficulties (especially

given the concerns expressed by developing countries), a number of developed countries proposed option 2 as a compromise, which involves smaller increases in contributions and cuts to the secretariat and Scientific Committee—but fewer cuts than option 1, which was supported by Norway and Benin.

The next agenda item was the “Proposal for the creation of a South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary,” presented by Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay. Antigua & Barbuda suggested that the creation of the sanctuary would interfere with the World Trade Organization’s rules, although Brazil had already explained in the proposal introduction that the sanctuary would have no impact on fishing and other activities in the area; rather, the sanctuary would benefit the region by strengthening cetacean science and local economies through the development of whale watching.

Overall, there was general support for the sanctuary, but no consensus was reached, as Norway and Iceland felt the sanctuary was not needed and did not meet the requirements of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling—the treaty through which the IWC was formed. Uruguay pushed back against these rejections and highlighted the inconsistency of countries that are affected by climate change working to resist the creation of a sanctuary that would benefit scientific research and bolster the role of cetaceans in mitigating climate change impacts. Brazil’s Humpback Whale Institute highlighted how the most recent scientific research has shown that whales benefit fisheries and ecosystem functioning.

The European Union was next to take the floor, proposing the resolution on marine plastic pollution, co-sponsored by the United States and the United Kingdom. Many contracting governments supported the resolution, including India, Korea, Benin, Liberia, and Guinea, with a number of contracting governments referencing the recently agreed upon UNEA resolution on plastics (https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/38522/k2200647_-_unep-ea-5-l-23-rev-1_-_advance.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y), which will lead the United Nations to create a binding agreement on plastics by 2024. Norway intervened to raise concerns about the IWC’s legal authority to deal with such an issue and the financial impact of the resolution. Eighteen NGOs, including AWI, expressed strong support for this resolution to combat the effects of plastic pollution on cetaceans.

Next, Ghana presented a resolution on food security. Norway, Solomon Islands, Liberia, Benin, Morocco, Saint Lucia, Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire, and Antigua & Barbuda were among its supporters. However many countries, while acknowledging the significance of food security, had numerous concerns with the resolution. Australia and the United States supported further discussion on this issue—with the latter recognizing the importance of aboriginal subsistence whaling—but were unable to accept the resolution in its current form. Mexico, Australia, the Republic of Korea, and others suggested food security issues were exacerbated by overfishing, and work needed to be done in this regard to effectively address food security. Further, Brazil and Mexico argued that the preservation of marine environments and their ecosystems is necessary to address food security, with the Republic Korea and New Zealand stating that the resumption of commercial whaling would not solve these food security concerns. Other concerns raised in interventions from Chile and the Czech Republic queried whether the IWC is the right forum to address food security. Lastly, the World Wide Fund for Nature, on behalf of 15 NGOs, made an intervention acknowledging the concern for food security but urging contracting governments to approach the matter in the appropriate way, including by addressing overfishing via the Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing.



The last resolution proposed concerned the potential lifting of the moratorium and resumption of commercial whaling. The proponents, Antigua & Barbuda and Saint Lucia, noting it has been 40 years since the establishment of the moratorium, argued that there should be discussions on lifting it. Norway said it supported the resolution, claiming that marine mammals can be sustainably harvested. Australia opposed the resolution on the grounds that (1) there has been no significant agreement on this issue for years, (2) there is low demand for whale meat globally, and (3) it is unaware of any current IWC state likely to invest in starting commercial whaling or supporting the costs of resuming negotiations of the Revised Management Procedure. The European Union noted that the moratorium is the only reason some whale populations are increasing, and therefore its removal would be detrimental. Japan—a non-member government to the IWC—expressed its support for the resolution. Twenty NGOs, including AWI, spoke in defense of the moratorium and expressed how the resolution was a contradiction of the Florianopolis Declaration. They highlighted the astronomical costs of reinstating commercial whaling, including the costs of monitoring and enforcement and the scientific research needed.

The meeting adjourned to allow various discussions on open agenda items to continue outside of plenary. In the evening, AWI's D.J. Schubert presented the Albert Schweitzer Medal (<https://awionline.org/content/schweitzer-medalists>) to Jenny Lonsdale, OBE, co-founder of the Environmental Investigation Agency and long-standing chair of the UK's NGO coalition working on cetacean issues.

OCTOBER 19, 2022 - DAY 3

The chair began the third day of plenary by thanking the NGOs for hosting a reception the previous evening.

The first items on the agenda were the reports of the Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling Sub-committee and the Whale Killing Methods and Welfare Issues Working Group. In the latter, the IWC endorsed a further workshop on euthanasia and mass strandings funded from the voluntary welfare fund. The European Union spoke in support of the working group report, especially the new Whale Welfare Assessment Tool and the strandings initiative, which provides response training and establishes local focal point coordinators. The European Union also emphasised that Iceland should submit its data on

whale kills from the 2022 season to the IWC. Eighteen NGOs supported an intervention that called on Norway and Iceland to stop commercial whaling and withdraw their respective objection and reservation to the moratorium on commercial whaling. They noted that since the moratorium was adopted in 1982, more than 17,500 whales have been killed.

The short report of the Infractions Sub committee was adopted next, with Australia observing the low number of infractions over the past four-year reporting period. This report was followed by the agenda item on catches by non-member governments, which applied to Japan for the first time. Japan noted that it provided research and catch data to the IWC. Antigua & Barbuda expressed a desire to have an intersessional meeting to discuss the fact that commercial whaling is taking place outside of the control of the IWC. Australia raised a series of concerns, including that this proposal had not been presented with the necessarily notice period, and the chair asked the two governments to find a way forward outside of plenary.

The reports of the Conservation Committee for 2020 and 2022 were adopted. Among other developments, the chair provided an update on the progress of the Bycatch Mitigation Initiative, which includes capacity building through technical workshops using the Bycatch Risk Assessment Tool. Under the whale-watching workstream, the IWC was informed that the whale-watching handbook has been updated to include guidelines relating to emerging technologies such as drones. The IWC endorsed a new workstream on climate change, which established an intersessional group on climate that would develop an IWC climate change response program to provide advice on tools to mitigate the negative impact of climate change and build resilience.

Before the adoption of the four Scientific Committee reports produced since 2019, the previous chair and current chair and vice chair responded to questions asked by delegates on a wide range of topics. Among other highlights, the chairs explained the committee's serious concern with the dire situation of North Atlantic right whales (which number only around 340 individuals and are declining due to entanglement and ship strikes). The committee encouraged the United States and Canada to reduce ship strikes to zero. On questions related to direct takes of small cetaceans, the committee reiterated its concerns about narwhals facing extirpation in southeast Greenland due to overhunting and about a take of 1,423 Atlantic white-sided dolphins in the Faroe Islands last year. Governments and NGOs both intervened on the issue of bycatch in the Gulf of California that is pushing the vaquita towards extinction.

IWC68 Plenary, Day 3



View the Plenary Video

Under the agenda item on cooperation with other organizations, AWI made an intervention supported by 20 NGOs expressing concern about international trade in whale products by Norway and Iceland that undermines the effectiveness of the CITES trade ban; we called on Norway, Iceland, and Japan—the three CITES parties that engage in trade of whale products—to stop issuing export permits and to withdraw their reservations to the Appendix I listing of whale products by CITES. Norway and Iceland together have exported more than 14.5 million kilograms of whale meat and blubber under reservation since 2011—with 99.5% of these products shipped to Japan.

OCTOBER 20, 2022 - DAY 4

Day four began with high hopes that, after decades of rejection, the proposal for a no-whaling sanctuary in the South Atlantic would finally be adopted. By the time the agenda item was opened, four more contracting governments had arrived, ready to vote for the proposal, which required a three-quarters majority to pass. Although the proponents could meet that high procedural bar, a quorum had to be present for a vote to take place. The IWC rules state that “attendance by a majority of the members of the Commission shall constitute a quorum”—meaning 45 of the IWC’s 88 members must be in attendance.

Aware of this, the following countries who opposed the sanctuary did not take their seats at the start of the session; by breaking the quorum they prevented the IWC from moving forward with the proposal.

- o Antigua & Barbuda
- o Benin
- o Cambodia
- o Cameroon

- Cote d'Ivoire
- Ghana
- Guinea
- Iceland
- Kiribati
- Laos
- Liberia
- Mauritania
- Morocco
- Nauru
- Palau
- Saint Lucia
- Solomon Islands

The rules of procedure are ambiguous and the chair of the Finance and Administration Committee, supported by the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, had a different interpretation of the quorum rule than some sanctuary proponents, who argued that since these countries were participating at IWC68, it didn't matter that they were not in attendance at the relevant session. Frustration ran high among the proponents, led by Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay, who felt the actions of the countries breaking quorum were a cynical undermining of the IWC. Strong interventions in support of this position were also made by NGOs from the region on behalf of millions of citizens who support whale conservation.

Ultimately, the legal issue could not be resolved and the chair closed the item with the proposal not voted on. The issue of what constitutes a quorum will be the first agenda item at the next meeting, to be held in 2024 in Peru.

Following this, there was a report from the chair of the Finance and Administration Committee on agenda item 6.3, on the governance reform proposals developed over the last four years. Proposed operational changes such as the creation of a management committee had not found support but other governance reforms were accepted by consensus. They include sensible changes to the function of the IWC Bureau and the sequencing of plenary and subsidiary bodies at the biennial meetings of the IWC. Although it was anticipated that the Working Group on Operational Effectiveness (WGOE) could be disbanded at the meetings, having completed its mandate, a number of intersessional tasks have been agreed to by the IWC this week and will be taken up by the WGOE. In addition to developing a proposal to address what constitutes a quorum, the working group will define criteria for what constitutes exceptional circumstances and a process for decision-making to support a possible future rule change regarding voting by governments in arrears. The WGOE will consider how to make payment plans by governments in arrears more accessible and investigate issues related to government delegates receiving visas to participate in IWC meetings. The WGOE will also consider the possibility of holding meetings in hybrid live/virtual formats and/or allowing for absentee voting to facilitate the participation of all member governments.

The biennial budget has not yet found consensus and the agenda item was held over to allow further consultations before the last day of the meeting.

Despite the earlier fractiousness of the meeting, a resolution on marine plastic pollution was accepted by consensus. Two other proposed resolutions—on food security and “on the implementation of a conservation and management program for whale stocks aimed towards the lifting of the moratorium and the orderly development of the whaling industry”—did not reach consensus and were held over to the next meeting.

OCTOBER 21, 2022 - DAY 5

The last day of the meeting opened with the election of the next chair (Amadou Telivel Diallo, commissioner for Guinea) and vice chair (Nick Gales, commissioner for Australia) of the IWC. The Guinean commissioner noted that, to highlight his government’s commitment to the IWC, its three years of arrears had been settled.

Next was the election of Bureau members. The United Kingdom stepped down after four years of service on the Bureau, and Belgium was approved as its replacement for a six-year term. Ghana, Argentina, and Saint Lucia will continue as members, but with staggered terms to ensure greater continuity in this body.

Returning to the budget reform strategy, the IWC adopted the proposal presented by the Working Group on Operational Effectiveness (WGOE), putting in place zero-based budgeting, costed work plans, four-year budgets, and increased accountability and transparency. No consensus was reached on a proposal to establish operating provisions for a working group on strategic planning; it will be considered further by the WGOE in the intersessional period.

A revised budget proposal for 2023 and 2024 was then considered. Consensus could not be reached on any of the three options originally proposed, but a compromise (“option 1.5”) was approved. Under this plan, contracting governments’ contributions (membership fees) will increase by 5% in 2023 and 1% in 2024—but only for countries in “capacity to pay” groups 3 and 4, which excludes the 57 countries in groups 1 and 2 with lower gross national income. Option 1.5 will result in a 6% reduction in expenditures, which will cause reductions to the research budget, cuts to secretariat staff, and a transition to virtual-only Bureau meetings. The budget was adopted with a single “no” vote by Italy, which, as a matter of policy, opposes increases in membership fees in international agreements. The budget situation will be revisited at IWC69.

Under agenda item 18 (other matters), Brazil affirmed its strong commitment to creating the South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary (SAWS) to benefit research on and public awareness of cetaceans, including through whale watching. Brazil registered its disappointment with the delegations that had blocked a quorum and prevented a vote by refusing to participate in the meeting when the SAWS proposal was presented the previous day. Colombia, Argentina, and Mexico supported Brazil, with Colombia seeking a change to the Rules of Procedure on quorum to prevent walkouts again. Argentina emphasized that it is “up to all of us that in all matters of the environment we should try to be consistent and thus behave responsibly, especially those countries that have a democratic tradition to uphold. ... We urge everyone to reflect how to respect our rights whilst respecting the rights of others.”

Benin and Antigua & Barbuda called Brazil’s expression of disappointment an affront to the countries that had been absent from the session (including their own). Antigua & Barbuda demanded that several objections be entered into the record—in particular, that the countries that had left acted consistently with the IWC’s Rules of Procedure and had tried to ensure that

their delegations could continue to participate. Finally, Antigua & Barbuda argued that the “Buenos Aires Group’s” comments were disrespectful to their participation and should be struck from the record. Brazil, Argentina, and Colombia insisted that their comments should remain in the record to accurately reflect the events that took place.

A number of NGOs highlighted their disappointment with the disruption to proceedings, and that it was regrettable that there could be no celebration of a new sanctuary. They urged future discussions to operate “via dialogue and deliberation, not disruption and desertion.” Further interventions by NGOs celebrated the adoption of the resolution on marine plastics by consensus and the continued operation of the moratorium on whaling.

DJ Schubert spoke on behalf of AWI and a number of NGOs, thanking all contracting governments for their efforts to find a compromise solution to the budget crisis facing the IWC and observing that the NGOs were hopeful that the budget reform strategy would create a foundation from which the IWC can build its financial resources. He regretted, however, that the compromise agreement would mean cuts to secretariat staff. He was pleased to announce that NGOs committed a collective £42,500 (~\$49,200) to the IWC’s voluntary funds, including over £16,100 (~\$18,600) to the small cetaceans voluntary fund and over £26,350 (~\$30,500) to the voluntary conservation fund, of which nearly half is earmarked for the Bycatch Mitigation Initiative. He noted that these funds are donated solely to support and advance the critically important conservation work of the IWC and follow all legal and transparency requirements.

The IWC agreed next that IWC69 will be held in Lima, Peru, in 2024. The next Scientific Committee meeting will be in Bled, Slovenia, in April 2023, and Antigua & Barbuda offered to host the one thereafter in 2024.

Finally, the meeting reached the last item: Adoption of the Summary of Main Outcomes. Most of the revisions were minor and technical in nature with the exception of agenda item 7. Agreement could not be reached on how the record should reflect the previous day’s discussion of the SAWS proposal. After more than an hour of discussion, the chair broke for coffee and urged Antigua & Barbuda and Argentina to reach agreement on wording, which they swiftly did. The meeting finally ended with a round of thanks to the outgoing chair and his thanks to delegates, NGOs, and the secretariat and support staff for making IWC68 possible.
