
2024: IWC69 in Lima, Peru

The 69th meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC69) was held in Lima, Peru in September 2024. The previous meeting, in 2022, had ended in recriminations and uncertainty after several developing countries, heavily influenced by the financial support they receive from former IWC member Japan, refused to reenter the meeting room after a break—taking advantage of ambiguous procedural rules to intentionally break quorum and prevent a vote on a proposed South Atlantic whale sanctuary.

Compounding this destabilizing event in 2022, the IWC was facing a serious budget shortfall due to the failure of many members to pay their annual fees, forcing painful cuts to the Scientific Committee's budget and the secretariat staff's benefits. In contrast, however, IWC69 in Lima, Peru was a successful and productive meeting.

In 2022, the unexpected absence of several conservation-oriented governments at IWC68 prevented the IWC from maintaining a quorum in the face of the Japan-orchestrated walkout. However, a considerable outreach effort by governments and NGOs in the intervening period ensured that almost all like-minded (anti-whaling) member governments were represented at IWC69, with their fees paid so they could vote. Unfortunately, thanks to one 11th-hour payment of fees in arrears, some last-minute submissions of repayment plans, and an ad-hoc ruling by the chair allowing a few countries that had small debts or had provided evidence that payment was forthcoming, several pro-whaling nations unexpectedly regained the right to vote. Sadly, this meant the aspirations of the strongly pro-conservation bloc of Latin American governments were once again dashed, as their proposal for the creation of a whale sanctuary in the South Atlantic fell two votes shy of the three-quarters majority required for adoption.

Other than this disappointment, the rest of the meeting was distinctly positive: quotas for Indigenous subsistence hunters were rolled over by consensus for another six years and, by an overwhelming majority, the IWC adopted a resolution proposed by the European Union reaffirming the importance of the moratorium on commercial whaling that has been in place since 1986. It also agreed, by consensus, to two other EU-led resolutions that affirm the value of the IWC's collaboration with other biodiversity-focused organizations, including collaborations on research and conservation in Antarctica—the critical feeding ground for southern hemisphere whales.

Two resolutions proposed by Japan's allies failed to find support. The first—from Antigua and Barbuda, Palau, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines—advocated lifting the moratorium. The other—from Cambodia, Congo-Brazzaville, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Republic of Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, and St. Kitts and Nevis—promoted the killing of whales to meet food security needs. The proponents ultimately withdrew both.

As the IWC continues to face budget challenges, more cuts may be needed. But at IWC69, the commissioners reached consensus on a new budget, including a fee increase to keep pace with inflation, and its fundraising efforts are increasing.

More scrutiny of Japan's influence

Another positive development at IWC69, evident from an unprecedented number of media reports, was long-overdue scrutiny of the small island and other developing states whose representatives have supported Japan's agenda at the IWC for decades. After the meeting, for example, the commissioner from Antigua and Barbuda came under pressure at home for his pro-whaling stance. He [acknowledged](#)

to his domestic press that his country's position at the IWC was influenced by more than \$200 million in Japanese development aid over the last 20 years. Meanwhile in West Africa, there has been extensive [media](#) coverage of an open letter signed by more than 110 government officials, scientists, and marine policy experts from the region, condemning their countries' pro-whaling position at the IWC and calling on them to withdraw the resolution they had proposed.

To ensure that Japan's insidious and costly influence at the IWC remains in the spotlight, AWI urges a review of the pitifully small fee Japan pays to attend meetings. Despite being a nonmember government, Japan's killing of IWC-protected whales still generates significant work for the secretariat and Scientific Committee. For example, in order to respond to Japan's recent resumption of North Pacific fin whale hunting, the Scientific Committee will need to deprioritize other work and schedule workshops to assess the structure and status of the target population and provide advice (that Japan will likely ignore) on whether the population can withstand hunting.

Japan paid less than \$8,000 for its six representatives to participate at IWC69. In contrast, it paid more than \$160,000 a year as an IWC member government before it withdrew in 2019. The IWC could help address its budget challenges by applying the same factors to calculate the charge for nonmember governments that it uses to set member governments' annual membership fees, including their gross domestic product and whaling activities.

AWI's continued commitment to the IWC

AWI began its involvement with the IWC in the early 1970s under the leadership of our founder, Christine Stevens, who was instrumental in launching the "Save the Whale" movement that led to the moratorium. Five decades later, we continue to be deeply involved in the work of this vital organization, including as active participants in its Scientific and Conservation Committees, subcommittees, and working groups. Our involvement ranges from providing financial support for the IWC's conservation and animal welfare work, providing technical input to many workstreams, facilitating the participation at meetings of several like-minded NGOs that otherwise would not be able to attend, to hosting virtual and in-person strategy sessions for the NGO community ahead of IWC meetings.