

ECO

International Whaling Commission Annual Meeting

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Whale Killers Apoplectic as Berlin Initiative for Conservation Passes

In a hard-won vote, the IWC approved the Berlin Initiative to establish an ongoing Conservation Committee. The vote was 25 countries in favor, with 20 voting no. Supporters cheered the passage of the Initiative when the definitive final vote was announced, while opponents raised wild claims of illegality and the destruction of the Commission.

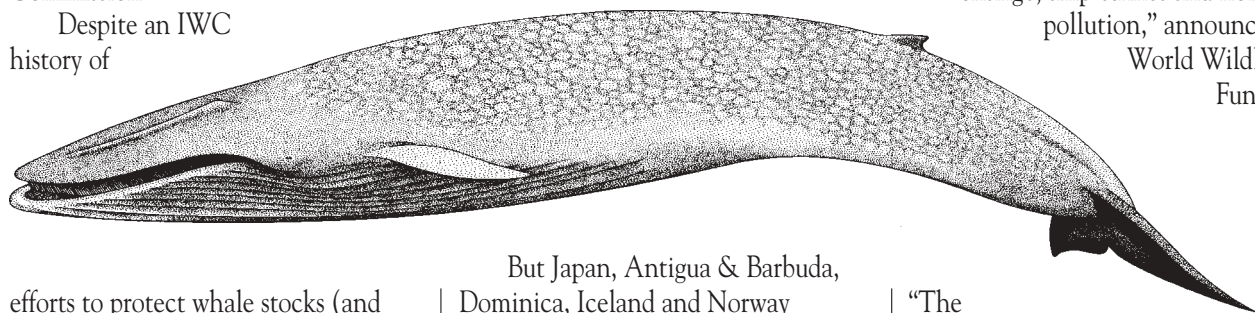
Despite an IWC history of

similar function is envisaged for the IWC Conservation Committee, to focus public and private resources on key conservation issues facing cetaceans and other marine life. Through such focused conservation initiatives, much can be achieved by coordinating various interests and available financial and scientific resources.

bloodletting at sea.

Major environmental and animal welfare organizations endorsed the Berlin Initiative. Greenpeace calls it “a major reorientation of the IWC, away from exploitation and towards conservation.”

“It has become essential to address the significant issues of by-catch, marine pollution, climate change, ship-strikes and noise pollution,” announced World Wildlife Fund.



efforts to protect whale stocks (and an even sadder and longer history of decimation of whale stocks that occurred under the purview of the Commission), some nations still fought bitterly to defeat the new measure, titled the Berlin Initiative, to strengthen the Conservation Agenda of the IWC.

Sponsored by 20 nations, the Berlin Initiative seeks to establish a new IWC Conservation Committee to assess progress made in conservation of whales, prepare recommendations for the IWC, and to implement conservation programs.

Many note the success of establishing similar conservation initiatives through the CITES treaty, which has resulted in key conservation achievements for threatened and endangered species. A

But Japan, Antigua & Barbuda, Dominica, Iceland and Norway adopted a “head in the sand” approach, trying to remove the debate altogether by first challenging the agenda of the IWC. When Commission voting firmly defeated that diversionary tactic, these nations cranked up the rhetoric during debate on the merits of the Berlin Initiative. At times, the claims from Norway and Antigua & Barbuda particularly verged on pure spite for the proponents of the proposal. The Berlin Initiative was a direct attack on the IWC; it would destroy the IWC; it was a backdoor approach to overthrow the Revised Management Scheme (RMS). Clearly, the whaling nations and their lap dogs view the Conservation provisions of the very Convention they are sworn to uphold as a threat to their continued

“The provisions of the Berlin Initiative offer an excellent start towards ensuring that the IWC fulfils this role effectively.”

After passage, several countries that opposed it, led by the defeated Japan, vowed they might not attend meetings nor financially support the Conservation Committee.

ECO says, so much the better for those countries that truly believe in conservation and protection of whales and the marine environment.

Congratulations to the 20 nations sponsoring the successful Berlin Initiative, especially the government of Mexico, whose defense and support for whales today was, once again, outstanding.

Confucius Says: Canadians Confused

Although Canada is no longer a member of the IWC, Canadian federal fisheries sent a representative to this year's Scientific Committee to report that another bowhead whale from a highly endangered population was killed in Canada's northern Foxe Basin in August 2002 without IWC authorization. That we know is true; it's the rest of the Canadian report that's confusing.

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Earthtrust

ECCEA

Greenpeace

Humane Society International

The Humane Society of the US

International Fund for Animal Welfare

International Wildlife Coalition

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Orcalab/Pacific Orca Society

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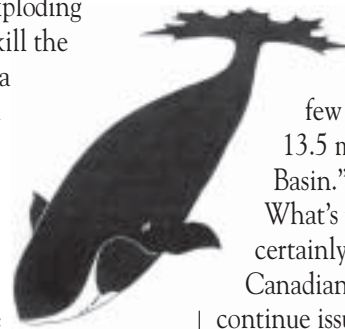
Protection of Marine Mammals

World Wide Fund for Nature

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Canada's representative Sue Cosens told the commission that one strike killed the whale, but Canadian whalers told the media last year that three shots from an exploding "bomb gun" failed to kill the whale and that it was a harpoon that inflicted the final, fatal wound.

Furthermore, Cosens informed the commission that there was no evidence that the landed female bowhead was lactating or pregnant, despite the fact that her own 1999 stock status report suggests that this area is a calving ground: "There is a direct correlation



between the number of adults and the number of calves photographed, suggesting that adults summering in northern Foxe Basin are nursing females. Data available so far suggest that adult males and non-calving

females are absent from northern Foxe Basin and that there are relatively few whales between 11.5 and 13.5 m. long in northern Foxe Basin."

What's not confusing, but is certainly alarming, is the Canadian government's policy to continue issuing whaling permits to hunt bowheads from highly endangered populations, while ignoring ongoing concerns expressed by the Scientific Committee and IWC Resolutions.

EU Petitioned on Underwater Noise

Sixty-five European and U.S. environmental and animal welfare organizations have petitioned the European Union to take action against very loud military sonars that kill whales and dolphins and threaten marine ecosystems.

Over the past few years, a number of incidents of whale strandings have occurred in conjunction with naval activities. Recent research on freshly stranded whales reveals severe damage to the inner ears of such whales as well general tissue damage similar to the formation of bubbles in SCUBA divers, causing severe pain known as "the bends."

Recent research suggests fish species and fisheries are at risk from these loud sound pulses. Effects on other marine life are largely unknown and untested.

Military sonars are being developed by NATO and several individual countries. Some of these systems, such as the U.S.-developed Low Frequency Active (LFA) sonar,

emit a sound pulse the equivalent of standing five feet from the Space Shuttle on takeoff.

(Deployment of the U.S. LFA Sonar system is currently being held up by a court order under a lawsuit brought by environmentalists. The court hearing is scheduled for June 30th. However, the U.S. Navy is still testing and training with the system in the Western Pacific Ocean. The Navy is also pushing legislation in Congress to overturn the U.S. environmental laws that currently constrain the use of LFA Sonar.)

The EU petitioners represent an estimated five and half million Europeans and Americans. They are asking the EU to take action to immediately mitigate and constrain the use of high intensity military sonars and initiate research on the effects of such sonars on the marine ecosystem. Current international laws and treaties should be modified to address underwater noise issues, in the same way that water and air pollution are being addressed.

Key Sanctuary Votes Pending

Once again, proposals for Whale Sanctuaries, off limits to whalers, are pending in the IWC.

Brazil and Argentina are again proposing a new Whale Sanctuary for the South Atlantic Ocean to protect whales and other marine life. The Sanctuary would emphasize nonlethal scientific research on whales and whale-watching expeditions, a growing tourist industry, especially in southern Argentina.

The proposal reads "The adoption of further sanctuaries in the Southern Hemisphere will ensure

that entire populations of whales are adequately conserved and will foster cooperative research in large scale."

The governments of New Zealand and Australia are proposing a new sanctuary for the South Pacific to protect whales.

The IWC, these governments point out, recognizes that whale sanctuaries complement the conservation benefits provided by the moratorium on commercial whaling.

"Any action that increases the level of public awareness of the marine environment provides flow-on

benefits for many aspects of marine management, and the care taken by people interacting with whale habitats. Increased public awareness of cetacean-related issues can reduce other key threatening processes and significant sources of injury and mortality to all marine life."

Both sanctuary proposals have been before the IWC during previous meetings, but have yet to be approved by a three-quarters majority vote. The two sanctuaries that exist today are the Indian Ocean and the Antarctic Ocean Sanctuaries.

A Shady Proposal for Grays: Rasputin Lives?

And what strange alchemy is the Russian Federation brewing up these days? And who is that bearded monk seen consulting with the Russian delegation?

The Russians propose that the

IWC allow sale and trade in parts of gray whales, specifically the blood, organs, endocrine glands, and other fluids. Meat and blubber would still be used only for "aboriginal subsistence" purposes. Authentic

native "artifacts" made out of gray whales would also be allowed by this proposal. Artistic whale blood? Tobacco pouches made from whale bladders?

We don't think so. The IWC should file this proposal under "subsistence shenanigans."

Can't Tell the IWC Players Without a Program!

ECO offers the following prognostications on likely members this year: who's in, who's out, and who's buying whom ...

Antigua and Barbuda
Argentina
Australia
Austria
Benin
Brazil
Chile
People's Republic of China
Costa Rica*
Denmark
Dominica
Finland

* Still a member, but without voting rights because of unpaid IWC dues.

France
Gabon*
Germany
Grenada
Republic of Guinea
Iceland (new member, sort of, with challenged reservations ...)
India
Ireland
Italy
Japan
Kenya*
Republic of Korea
Mexico
Monaco
Mongolia
Morocco
Netherlands
New Zealand
Nicaragua
Norway

Oman
Palau
Panama
Peru
Portugal
Russian Federation
Saint Kitts and Nevis
Saint Lucia
Saint Vincent & Grenadines
San Marino
Senegal*
Solomon Islands
South Africa
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
United Kingdom
United States of America

Rumored to be *thinking* about joining: Belgium, Belize, Cape Verde, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, and Samoa.

Minamata Revisited: The End of Japan's Commercial Whaling?

The release of new information on the contamination of cetacean products widely available on Japan's supermarket shelves is bound to have grave consequences to Japan's commercial whaling. A report released last week by the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) exposed evidence that the Japanese public face a undeniable risk from consuming dangerously high levels of mercury in cetacean products readily available throughout the country.

The EIA Report, *Mercury Rising*, reveals a tale of mislabeled whale and dolphin meat found throughout Japan laden with mercury. One sample of Dall's porpoise meat had a mercury level of 6.93ppm, more than 17 times higher than the maximum level allowed by Japan's health regulations. Indeed, in a total of 58 samples of whale, dolphin, and porpoise meat taken from Japan markets, fully 62% showed mercury levels that exceeded government limits, while 53% had methylmercury levels in excess of government guidelines. Bottlenose dolphin meat sold in Okayama was laden with methylmercury concentrations of 10.88 ppm, 36

times higher than Japan's allowable level.

Mercury, a potent neuro-toxin, is a naturally occurring element in the



Killer Porpoise: With alarmingly high levels of mercury and other contaminants, marine mammals may, for the first time, start harming and killing humans in large numbers.

environment; however, human-caused releases have increased the global level of mercury in the environment three-fold in the last two centuries. Small cetaceans and large predatory fish, high on the food chain, readily accumulate inorganic methylmercury in their muscle tissues and internal organs. Methylmercury poisoning in humans can cause irreversible neurological damage with symptoms including impaired speech and vision, reproductive disorders, and in severe cases can lead to coma or death.

There has been a growing global concern over mercury levels in predatory fish and numerous

countries have warned the public to limit their consumption of large fish species. Cetacean products can contain mercury levels tens of

hundreds of times higher than the average levels commonly found in large predatory fish. Mercury and methylmercury limits set by the Government of Japan were exceeded by the majority of the 58 cetacean products sampled by EIA in Japan over the last two

years.

The Japanese government released a warning for pregnant women to limit their consumption of sperm whale and bottlenose dolphin meat due to dangerously high levels of mercury typical in meat products from these species.

Although Japan's advisory is a step towards protecting public health, widespread mislabeling makes it impossible for consumers to distinguish between the different types of cetacean products on the market, making the health risk of consuming any cetacean products in Japan too high.

The Abbreviated ECO Guide to IWC-Speak

As a public service, *ECO* provides the following definitions for useful phrases used at IWC meetings:

Cockroaches of the Sea—Japanese for whales.

Crazies—Icelandic for environmentalists.

Eco—see *ego*

Ego—see *Eco*

Fish Gobblers—Norwegian for whales.

Humane Killing—Bloodshed when no video cameras are around.

Non-governmental Organization—Nonprofit willing to pay US\$ 850 for the privilege of sitting in uncomfortable chairs in hot, airless balconies to listen to the IWC debates.

Rats of the Sea—See cockroaches.

Scientific Whaling—Oxymoron.

Sustainable Utilization—Kill 'em all and hope they grow back.

Tradition—Behavior based on past activities that may or may not have ever happened.

Toxic Contamination—A lethal threat that must not be discussed.

Transparency—You get to know everything, as long as you pledge to do absolutely nothing about it.