

Press Release from the 5th Special Meeting of the International Whaling Commission, Cambridge, UK, 14 October 2002

Special Meeting 2002 The Special Meeting took place on 14 October 2002 at the DeVere University Arms Hotel, Cambridge, UK, under the Chairmanship of Prof. Bo Fernholm (Sweden).

The primary purpose of the meeting was to reconsider the issue of catch limits for the aboriginal subsistence catch of bowhead whales. No new limits had been agreed at the 54th Annual Meeting. In addition it had been agreed to include an item on an interim relief allocation for Japanese coastal whaling. This had also been on the agenda of the 54th Annual Meeting (and a number of previous meetings).

Icelandic membership

As at the last two Annual Meetings, the major item discussed in the morning concerned the adherence of Iceland to the Convention with a reservation to Paragraph 10(e). That paragraph refers to what is popularly termed the 'moratorium' on commercial whaling.

There was again a difference of views as to whether the Commission should accept Iceland's reservation. After a series of procedural votes, the Commission agreed by 19 votes to 18, that Iceland is a member of the Commission.

Catch limits for aboriginal subsistence whaling

At the 54th meeting, despite (i) agreement by the Scientific Committee that the bowhead whale stock was able to sustain the harvest, and (ii) acknowledgement of the cultural, nutritional and subsistence needs of both Alaskan Eskimos and native peoples of Chukotka, a proposal to continue to include provision for such catches failed to reach the necessary three-quarters majority (32 votes were in favour, 11 against and 2 abstentions). The reason given by some of the 11 countries who voted no was that they believed Japan should also be allocated subsistence whales for four coastal whaling villages. They also referred to their belief that there was some scientific uncertainty about the ability of the bowhead stock to sustain the requested levels.

At the Special Meeting, a proposal allowing up to 280 bowhead whales to be landed in the period 2003 - 2007, with no more than 67 whales struck in any year (and up to 15 unused strikes may be carried over each year), was accepted by consensus. It contains a proviso that this be reviewed in the light of the Scientific Committee's work at the 2004 meeting and beyond.

Interim relief allocation for Japanese coastal whaling

This issue has been discussed by the Commission for the last 15 years. It concerns the possible allocation of a catch of 50 minke whales annually to four Japanese coastal communities until the Commission has finalised a Revised Management Scheme. A draft resolution was proposed by Japan intended to forward discussions on the issue and arrive expeditiously at a solution. It was defeated by 19 votes to 16 with 2 abstentions.