

## **Press Release from 54<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting Shimonoseki, Japan, May 2002**

**54th Annual Meeting** The Annual Meeting took place from 20-24 May 2002 at the Kaikyo Messe Conference Centre, Shimonoseki, Japan, under the Chairmanship of Prof. Bo Fernholm (Sweden). Delegates thanked the Government of Japan and the people of Shimonoseki for their warmth, hospitality and for the excellent facilities provided.

The associated meetings of the Scientific Committee and Commission Committees and Working Groups were held at the same venue in the period 24 April - 19 May 2002.

**Icelandic membership** As last year, the major item discussed on the first 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 a difference of views as to whether the Commission should accept Iceland's reservation. A vote to uphold last year's decision, that Iceland should '**assist in the meeting as an observer.**' was agreed by 25 votes to 20 votes.

Iceland subsequently left the meeting, stating its belief that the vote was illegal.

*[Note: see Press Release from October 2002 Special Meeting]*

**Catch limits for commercial whaling** In 1982, the Commission took a decision, which came into force from the 1986 and 1985/86 seasons, that catch limits for all commercial whaling would be set to zero.

Norway has lodged objections to the ban and has exercised its right to set national catch limits for its coastal whaling operations for minke whales. As in previous years, the Commission did not adopt a proposal by Japan for an interim relief allocation of 50 minke whales to be taken by coastal community-based whaling (20 votes for, 21 against and 3 abstentions).

**Revised Management Scheme** Although the Commission has accepted and endorsed the Revised Management Procedure (RMP) for commercial whaling, it has noted that work on a number of issues, including specification of an inspection and observer system must be completed (called the Revised Management Scheme) before the Commission will consider establishing catch limits other than zero. This work is ongoing and the Commission agreed to hold an intersessional Commissioners' meeting in October 2002 to forward this work.

**Sanctuaries** Proposals for sanctuaries in the South Pacific (24 votes for, 16 against and 5 abstentions) and South Atlantic (23 votes for, 18 against and four abstentions) failed to gain the necessary three-quarters majorities to be adopted. Similarly a proposal to change the provision for the Southern Ocean Sanctuary was not adopted (17 votes for, 25 against and 2 abstentions).

**Catch limits for aboriginal subsistence whaling** The Scientific Committee has continued to make progress towards developing new management regimes for aboriginal subsistence whaling; this work has been given high priority by the Commission. This year, the Commission endorsed and adopted a new long-term scientific approach to providing advice on strike limits for bowhead whales. The Scientific Committee is working to produce similar methods for the other whales stocks subject to aboriginal subsistence whaling.

A considerable amount of time was spent trying to agree new catch limits for several stocks subject to aboriginal subsistence whaling. Ultimately, the Commission agreed to

the following:

*Eastern North Pacific gray whales (taken by those whose "traditional, aboriginal and subsistence needs have been recognised")* - A total catch of 620 whales is allowed for the years 2003 - 2007 with a maximum of 140 in any one year.

*West Greenland fin whales (taken by Greenlanders)* - An annual catch of 19 whales is allowed for the years 2003 - 2007.

*West Greenland minke whales (taken by Greenlanders)* - The annual number of whales struck for the years 2003-2007, shall not exceed 175 (up to 15 unused strikes may be carried over each year).

*East Greenland minke whales (taken by Greenlanders)* - An annual catch of 12 whales is allowed for the years 2003 - 2007 (up to 3 unused strikes may be carried over each year).

*Humpback whales (taken by St Vincent and The Grenadines)* - For the seasons 2003-2007 the number of humpback whales to be taken by the Bequians of St. Vincent and the Grenadines shall not exceed 20. The meat and products of such whales are to be used exclusively for local consumption in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Such whaling must be conducted under formal legislation that accords with the submission of the Government of St Vincent and the Grenadines (IWC/54/AS 8 rev) and the correction to page 3. The quota for the seasons 2006 and 2007 shall only become operative after the Commission has received advice from the Scientific Committee that the take of 4 humpback whales for each season is unlikely to endanger the stock.”

The taking of calves or females accompanied by calves is forbidden.

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 stressed that they also believed that the peoples of Alaska and Chukotka should also be granted their catch limits.

The defeated proposal would have allowed up to 280 bowhead whales to be landed in the period 2003 - 2006, with no more than 68 whales struck in any year (and up to 14 unused strikes may be carried over each year). [*Note: see Press Release from Special Meeting*]

### **Status of whales**

Despite a long period of protection, several populations of great whales remain highly endangered and number 500 or less. These include all bowhead whale stocks apart from the Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort Seas stock that numbers over 9,000; gray whales in the western Pacific (those in the eastern Pacific, by contrast, number over 17,000); all stocks of northern right whales; and various stocks of blue whales. Some of these small Arctic bowhead populations are subjected to direct catches outside IWC regulations (a bowhead was taken in 2000 by Canadian Eskimos), or are killed by ship strikes or are bycaught in fishing gear. The Commission has attached great importance to trying to improve the survivorship of these stocks.

### **Scientific Permits**

Two proposed permits were considered. One is an extension of its continuing programme in the Southern Hemisphere (now 400±10% minke whales from the Antarctic). The second is for a long-term research programme primarily aimed at feeding ecology in the context of contributing to the ‘conservation and sustainable use of marine living resources in the western North Pacific, especially within Japan’s EEZ.’ The programme proposes the taking of 150 minke whales, 50 Bryde’s whales, 50 sei whales and 10

sperm whales in the western North Pacific. Different views on the value of this research were expressed in the Scientific Committee and the Commission.

**Whale killing methods and associated welfare issues** In 1998, the Commission passed a Resolution that encouraged nations to supply relevant data on killing times and related issues in future years and also to provide technical assistance to reduce time to unconsciousness and death in aboriginal subsistence fisheries. This year, the Commission reviewed progress in the context of the revised 'Action Plan' developed by the Commission in 1998 and will hold an expert workshop on this issue in 2003.

**Environmental Research** In recent years, the Commission has strengthened its commitment to research on environmental changes and the effects on cetaceans. In particular, last year, it has provided some 'seed funding' for two major collaborative research initiatives made by its Scientific Committee with respect to (1) chemical pollutants (POLLUTION 2000+) and (2) baleen whale habitat and prey studies in co-operation with CCAMLR and Southern Ocean GLOBEC (SOWER 2000). However, these programmes require considerably more funding if they are to succeed and the Commission has decreased funding for research this year. Governments and others are requested to provide additional funding.

The Scientific Committee will hold a modelling workshop to begin looking at the issue of interactions between fisheries and cetaceans. *[Note: this workshop took place in La Jolla, USA in July 2002]*

**Small Cetaceans** Notwithstanding the different views of member countries over the legal competence of the IWC to manage small cetaceans, many Contracting Governments continue to co-operate in the consideration of small cetacean issues, particularly with respect to the work of the Scientific Committee.

**Financial contributions** During the year, the Commission-appointed Task Force worked intersessionally to develop a more equitable scheme for financial contributions. Specifically, a new scheme should reduce the financial burden of membership of small developing countries. At the Meeting, the Task Force reported that it had made good progress but had not yet been able to produce a fully-developed scheme. The Commission directed the Task Force to try to complete its work by the next Annual Meeting in 2003. In the meantime, the Commission adopted an interim scheme which gives a substantial amount of relief to a number of member governments.

**Future Annual Meetings** The 2003 meetings will take place in Berlin, Germany, from 26 May to 19 June.

The 2004 meetings will take place in May in Italy.