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## Cooperative Spirit Emerges at Whaling Commission Meeting

**SANTIAGO, Chile**, June 24, 2008 (ENS) - With whaling nations and their allies on one side and pro-conservation nations on the other, annual meetings of the International Whaling Commission have been increasingly gridlocked and acrimonious. But today at the 60th annual IWC meeting in Santiago there was a breakthrough. The 81 member governments agreed on a new way of dealing with the issues that separate them.

After intensive discussions among officials during the last week, including a closed door commissioners' meeting on Sunday all nations seem prepared to make the new approach work.

First, the IWC has agreed to change the rules of engagement under which meetings operate, in the hope of developing an atmosphere more conducive to change.

The establishment of a small working group, which is the second development, will allow substantive issues that have persisted in



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dividing the Commission to be addressed. The group will attempt to resolve 33 significant issues.

"This a major step forward - for the first time in 20 years we have agreed to a concrete process to talk about the substantive issues that divide us," said New Zealand Conservation Minister Steve Chadwick in Santiago.



**New Zealand Conservation Minister Steve Chadwick (Photo courtesy Govt. of New Zealand)**

The crux of the problem is that commercial whaling has been prohibited throughout the world's oceans for the last 20 years, but in reality it has continued under the guise of scientific whaling by Japan.

"Members of the Commission have always known what these issues are, but until now have never agreed to sit down together and try to find a way out of the impasse,"

Chadwick said.

"My meeting yesterday with Peter Garrett, the Australian Minister for the Environment, reconfirmed both countries' determination to find a way to end scientific whaling," said Chadwick. "New Zealand and Australia share very similar views on whale conservation and we will continue to work closely at the IWC to ensure a constructive meeting that maximizes the protection of whales."

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The IWC meeting is chaired by Dr. William Hogarth, formerly head of the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service, who now chairs the IWC.

The meeting opened Monday with speeches of welcome by Chilean Minister of Foreign Affairs Alejandro Foxley and Chilean Minister for the Environment Ana Lya Uriarte.

Outside the meeting, Uriarte and more than a thousand Chileans formed a human whale sculpture, calling for the protection of whales.

Today, Chilean President Michelle Bachelet and ministers from Chile, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Costa Rica gathered at Quintay on the coast, to witness the declaration of the new marine sanctuary in the Gulf of Corcovado. Establishing this new sanctuary demonstrates Chile's commitment to marine protection.

The IWC Scientific Committee reported on the status of Antarctic minke whales, North Pacific common minke whales, Southern Hemisphere humpback whales, Southern Hemisphere blue whales and small populations of bowhead, right and gray whales.

There was positive evidence of increases in abundance for humpback, blue and right whales in the Southern Hemisphere, although they remain at reduced levels compared to their pre-whaling numbers.

Special attention was paid to the status of the endangered western North Pacific gray whale, whose feeding grounds coincide with oil and gas

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operations off Sakhalin Island, Russian Federation. The population numbers only about 120 animals and although there is evidence that it has been increasing at perhaps three percent per year over the last decade, any additional deaths, for example in fishing gear as has recently occurred, put the survival of the population in doubt, the Scientific Committee said.

The commission agreed to work together to try to mitigate human threats to this endangered population and there was praise for Japanese efforts to reduce bycatches in its waters.

Ship strikes and entanglements are a threat to the endangered western North Atlantic right whale population which numbers around 300. The commission agrees again that mortality due to human causes should be reduced to zero as soon as possible.

A new report submitted to the IWC Scientific Committee by the International Fund for Animal Welfare, IFAW, appears to confirm warnings from international researchers and conservationists that Japan is underreporting the number of whales it kills each year.



**An endangered fin whale (Photo courtesy IWC)**

"The government of Japan is unable to regulate the sale of whale meat in the country," said Naoko Funahashi, director of IFAW Japan and co-author of the report. "DNA testing proves more fin whales are being sold in Japan than the government admits having killed."

The research team, led by Dr. Scott Baker of Oregon State University, analyzed DNA from 99 whale meat products purchased in Japanese markets since 2006 and identified six baleen whale species - humpback, fin, sei, Bryde's, North Pacific minke, and Antarctic minke.

In the case of the fin whales, the study used methods similar to human forensic genetics to identify products from a total of 15 individuals for sale in 2006 and 2007.

But Japan reported a total of 13 fin whales killed

under its scientific whaling program over the same period. Official records of whales entangled and killed in fishing nets do not seem to account for the additional fin whale meat in the market.

Although the government of Japan claims to have DNA records for each whale killed, it refuses to share the information, said Funahashi.

After considering the new report from the market surveys, the Scientific Committee again urged Japan to provide such data to help detect any illegal, unreported or unregulated catches.

Three reports presented to the IWC Scientific Committee by conservationists Monday offer evidence that overfishing, not whales, is responsible for declining fish stocks around the world.

The Humane Society International, WWF and the Lenfest Ocean Program offered reports debunking the science behind the "whales-eat-fish" claims emanating from whaling nations Japan, Norway and Iceland. The argument has been used to bolster support for whaling, particularly from developing nations.

"Who's eating all the fish? The food security rationale for culling cetaceans," the report co-authored by Dr. Daniel Pauly, director of the University of British Columbia Fisheries Centre for the Humane Society International contrasts "the widely different impacts of fisheries and marine mammals."

Fisheries target larger fish where available and

marine mammals consume mainly smaller fish and tiny crustaceans such as krill, the report points out.



**Humpback whales feeding in Alaskan waters**  
(Photo courtesy [Alaska Charters](#))

"Making whales into scapegoats serves only to benefit wealthy whaling nations while harming developing nations by distracting any debate on the real causes of the declines of their fisheries," Pauly said.

"Dr. Pauly's findings should refute, once and for all, the misconception that whales are eating all the fish and need to be killed to protect the world's fisheries," said Patricia Forkan, president of the Humane Society International.

Also presented to the IWC Scientific Committee was an analysis of the interaction between whales and commercial fisheries in northwest Africa. The model, funded by the Lenfest Ocean Program, shows no real competition between local or foreign fisheries and great whales.

The third report is a review of the scientific

literature originating from Japan and Norway - the two countries most strongly promoting the idea that whales pose problems for fisheries. Funded by WWF, the study found flaws in much of the science and concluded that "where good data are available, there is no evidence to support the contention that marine mammal predation presents an ecological issue for fisheries."

Dr. Susan Lieberman of WWF said, "These three reports provide yet more conclusive evidence that whales are not responsible for the degraded state of the world's fisheries. It is now time for governments to focus on the real reason for fisheries decline - unsustainable fishing operations."

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