

IWC 63
Island of Jersey, UK
11th-14th July 2011



Photo Credit: Paul Spong Orcalab

Day 1

The Annual Plenary started with the question of who will be this year Chair of the Commission. It turns out that Mr. Herman Osterhausen (South African Commissioner), was offered to be the interim Chair of the IWC yesterday during the Commissioners Meeting.

The Opening ceremony started with Alan Maclean Senator of Jersey. He welcomed the participants of the IWC63 on behalf of the States of Jersey. Chairman Herman mentioned the new member countries. This year it is Colombia. The Commissioner of Colombia mentioned that they do not support the lethal use of cetaceans and that they are committed to strength their national conservation policy. Colombia also expressed the importance of the moratorium and mentioned that whale watching is an important business for Colombians.

The Dominican Republic was supposed to be at the IWC63 as new member country, but they are not here (at least not yet).

Poland holds since July the 1st the Presidency of the European Council. Delegates of the Polish government have never been there, so CATCA is anxious about how they will coordinate the EU meetings. Only the Commissioner and another person (from Forestry) are there. Since CATCA got Poland to join the IWC after a massive international campaign that we launched in 2008, it is our concern. In 2008, CATCA convinced and invited Dr. Inz..A. Kepel to the IWC annual meeting and in 2009 he was elected out as the first Polish Commissioner at the IWC.

This year as we expected, there are many countries that are having their voting rights suspended because of lack of payment. CATCA suspected this may happen because after all the tragedies that have been affecting the Japanese people this year: earthquakes, the tsunami and the radiation leaks, CATCA and other IWC NGO's believe that Japan was not going to be able to pay for all their "friends" member fees to participate at the IWC63. These payments that we mention here, not only include the membership fees (which doubled this year), but are also for their travel, staying at 5 star hotels, eating in fancy restaurants and even for "ladies of the night", as it was uncovered last year.

Some of those countries are already here, but because they didn't pay their fees they will have no voting rights. Many are absent.

Unfortunately due to the global economical crisis, many like minded countries (pro-conservation), are absent or without voting rights, specially from Central and Eastern Europe: Hungary, Slovakia, Romania.

Japan itself only has 26 people on its delegation this year, when usually there are about 70.

The Chairman mentioned that the NGO's will be able to speak again on both sides: The conservation and the sustainable groups.

It is very interesting to see two new technological advances on this IWC meeting:

- 1) The Commissioners will no longer need to raise their flag and be waving it to catch the Chairman attention. Now with the press of a button the Chairman will be aware of the countries waiting to speak, in the order that they pressed the button..
- 2) The NGO's got desks this year (WOW), with plugs to recharge the laptops and even water. Holy miracle!!!!

The agenda starts. St Kitts and Nevis is worried about the credentials, because he states that some countries had problems with their visas. The UK Minister claims that there are not any problems. The Finance Working Group Report is accepted.

Japan spoke and thanked all the countries for their concerns and offers to help them after the Japanese earthquakes. He said that coastal communities were completely devastated and as a consequence it is necessary to promote even more the sustainable use of the whales.

Scientific Committee (SC)

Whale stocks

Dr. Debbie Palka started to talk about the Antarctic minke whales: There are several circumpolar estimates and this is not clear if this shows a reduction on the populations due to the Japanese hunt.

Mexico thanked Jersey and expressed their solidarity with Japan, because of the earthquake tragedy. Mexico is worried that the estimates of minkes are low in some areas, which could be a decline on the population.

Japan thanked Dr Debbie Palka and mentioned that the disparity between estimates is very close and looks to a solution of the problem. The Scientific Committee is still trying to figure out this and why it happened in an area of the Southern Ocean. The scientists never noticed large scale mortality, but they have noticed humpbacks and fins in the area. Japan is glad that data from JARPA 2 (lethal research programs from Japan), is used in the calculations.

Southern humpback whale stocks

The Commissioner of the US thanked Jersey for their hospitality and the IWC Secretariat. She mentioned that part of the research was done by a US member of the Scientific Committee. The SC report was endorsed.

Blue whales.

Dr. Palka started with the report on the status of studies into their populations. Chile takes the floor and thanks Jersey and congratulates the Chair. Chile says the blue whale is emblematic for them and emphasized how the government of Chile supports their research. The Commissioner is worried that the populations are smaller than in other places, so they are concerned that this population is smaller than those elsewhere, which means they need to be carefully monitored. The SC report was endorsed.

Gray whales

Dr. Palka notes this was discussed in the Aboriginal Whaling Subcommittee. Dr. Palka mentioned a 13 year old gray whale male known as "Flex" who left the Okhotsk Sea and went to a location within 20 miles of the Oregon coast where the tag failed (this was not an expected migratory route). Despite this movement, some photo ID and genetic matches, more information is required to be able to understand the relationship between the small western gray whales and the large populations on the Pacific coast in the US.

Dr. Palka emphasized the importance of the SC's Research Program to be able to understand the relationship between these populations and the requirement to get reliable data from the oil industries that are very active in the Sakhalin whaling breeding grounds.

Korea, mentioned that western whalers have reduced the gray whale stock. The US says that they find Flex migration interesting and that the US funded photo ID work to help this year IWC63. The US will conduct more investigation, including tagging.

Russia said that only one specimen was tagged. 12 western gray whales will be tagged this season and biopsies will be done.

Mexico is worried about the status of the western gray whales and the gas and oil threats in their habitat in this country.

The UK mentions the critically endangered status of the gray whales and how all the industrial activities threaten them. The UK said that small numbers of whales could have other threats on their migratory journey to be able to understand this in a better way.

Japan is also concerned about its status. From 2008 Japan has reinforced its domestic law and they prohibited all forms of take of this species.

Day 2

To start, I have to mention that Dr Frédéric Briand, who is the IWC Commissioner for Monaco, on June 20th at the UN in New York, presented a proposal to consider possible changes on the interpretations and the implementation of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Dr. Briand proposed that the UN support the complete and permanent protection of all highly migratory whales and dolphins when they are in the high seas. His Proposal was very well received at the UN and it is expected that action will be taken on this issue this year, during their General Assembly.

The IWC has proven not to be efficient to protect the whales from illegal hunt, so this Proposal of Monaco seems to offer a good chance for the whales and dolphins.

The morning was supposed to start with the report of the Finance and Administration Committee, but instead Japan moved ahead the "Safety at Sea" item. As usual, the never ending complains

of Japan's misadventures on the Antarctic because of the SSCS started, taking valuable time from many other worthy and more important items on the agenda.

Australia made a sharp comment, stating that is about time the Japanese stop calling "research" ships to their whale hunting ships.

Australia prepared a well report on the Finance and Administration Committee. This report contained some recommendations for future IWC meetings, such as to have a biennial meeting instead of annual meetings, which would begin after the 2012 meeting. The Scientific Committee would still hold annual meetings, but they would be separated from the Commission meetings.

On the issue of allowing more NGO's to participate, Norway and Iceland (and other whaling countries), totally oppose it.

St. Kitts and Nevis has been complaining about visa issues and mentioned that the delegation of Cote d' Ivoire is stuck in France. The UK spoke saying that they sent several months ago all the instructions for all the parties to check for visa requirements and information in how to get their visa.

The recommendation of the Finance and Administration Committee to have bank transfers from the governmental accounts to pay for the member countries membership fees and the right to vote, was heavily attacked by St. Kitts and Nevis and then by Ghana and Antigua, "explaining" that they are poor and for them it is difficult, and all the usual complains.

All the objections forced the Commissioners into private sessions that turned to hours and Poland on behalf of the EU was obstructed to introduce a proposal on transparency and governance.

Day 3

The day opened with some good news: The IWC finally has taken proper measures to avoid corruption.

Thanks to the UK Proposal to improve the method of paying the member countries fees for their participation, now they will pay by bank transfer from government accounts, enabling traceability. This means, that no more cash from the Japanese friends will be accepted upon their arrival. This made many delegates angry as they are used to have large amounts of money (courtesy from the Japanese), to pay for their membership fees to be able to vote according to their "boss". During several years the number of new member countries participating at the IWC and voting in support of Japan and all the pro-whaling activities has increased, to the point of been about half of the member countries. These allies of Japan, every year make the IWC waste hours of valuable time that could be used to discuss crucial issues regarding whale conservation.

The EU made the initial proposal, but when Denmark opposed it, then the UK took it.

Six NGO's were ready to speak, but the European Commission wanted to have the bloc act in agreement, but to have Denmark agree they had to leave the NGO's for later. Few hours before, the Danish commissioner complained about the SSCS and called them fanatics and that it shows how irresponsible NGO's can be, so that is a reason for the restricted treatment of NGO's at IWC meetings.

SSCS have been barred from the IWC meetings for several years, but still holds small demos outside the place of the meeting, which often is a hotel or conference center. The IWC delegates, Commissioners and often even the media ignore these small demos.

Japan still intends to send its whaling fleet back to the Antarctic this year.

Rumors are that the economical problems after all the natural disasters that have affected this year to Japan, the new rules at sea, not enough market for the whale meat in Japan and that the Nisshin Maru will not be allowed in the Antarctic with tanks full of heavy fuel oil, are all affecting Japan's whaling.

NOTE: one Japanese scientific claim that whale meat hasn't been selling for years and that there are more than 6,000 tons of frozen whale meat in Japan. He also claimed that the Japanese whaling industry doesn't need more whale meat. He made a comment, stating that if Japan pulls out of the Antarctic, it will be seen as if they have surrender to the harassment of the anti whaling organizations and the politicians will not accept that.

Day 4

The Safety at Sea item started the morning session. Japan criticized the SSCS protests and emphasized to the primacy of the International Maritime Organization regarding maritime safety issues. The resolution was accepted by consensus.

Next was the proposed South Atlantic Whales Sanctuary. Brazil, on behalf of the Buenos Aires Group introduced it. Several statements were done supporting the proposal, but Palau opposed it.

India spoke and urged Palau not to break the consensus, which Palau eventually agreed. Then Iceland spoke against the proposal. Ecuador and Columbia appealed.

Some NGO interventions were done and the Chair then called for a small break. The break was then 1 hour. There were rumors that Japan was giving threats to walk out of the meeting with all its supporters, to avoid the minimum number required for a valid meeting, if any vote was called for, and Japan just did that.

Then the Chair asked the Secretary to prepare for a vote. Monaco said that to vote in a democracy is a normal thing to do when an agreement can't be reached. Poland recommended a break; the Chair asked Brazil and Argentina if they wanted to have a vote. These two countries answered that they wanted a vote and then all the Japanese delegation stood up and left with their allies; Cambodia, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Iceland, Norway, Nauru, Mongolia, Mauritania, Guinea-Bissau, Grenada, Kiribati, Morocco, Korea, Ghana, Palau, Togo, Russia, Tuvalu, St. Kitts and Nevis, and St. Lucia.

The Chair called for a brief Commissioners meeting for 10 minutes, but 8 hours passed by. The chair finally re-opened the meeting. No important discussions were taken and several unfinished business were moved for next year, including the South Atlantic Proposal. Apparently the Chair threatened to resign if a vote would happen.

The voting for the Chair and Vice Chair will be by mail and the IWC64 will be held in Panama.

Comments: It turns out that Poland had two Delegates in "the front" leading the EU. There were three other delegates assisting them with other issues. They did a good job.

CATCA would like to thank Paul Spong of Orcalab for all the information.

Ericka Ceballos
CATCA