



## BRIEFING: INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION INTERSESSIONAL MEETING ROME, 9<sup>th</sup> -11th March 2009

**The exclusive focus of the International Whaling Commission's (IWC) Intersessional meeting will be a proposal from a Small Working Group of the IWC which suggests granting Japan legal commercial whaling quotas in its coastal waters in return for it voluntarily reducing its scientific whaling in Antarctica.**

**This 'compromise deal', details of which were published on 2 February 2009, is aimed at ending the perceived 'deadlock' between pro- and anti-whaling members of the IWC. If it is adopted by the IWC, it will sanction commercial whaling for the first time since the moratorium was put in place, over twenty years ago. WDCS has called for the rejection of this deal as unworkable, unenforceable and dangerous for the conservation of whales.**

### **Shortcomings of the deal**

By focusing narrowly on reducing Japan's scientific whaling programme in Antarctica (JARPA) and bringing this hunt under international control, the deal:

- Underestimates the threat that Norway and Iceland's increasing whaling poses to the effective conservation of whales and the stability of the IWC.
- Implies that scientific whaling is acceptable if practiced on a smaller scale, in a different area, or on 'less popular' species.
- Overlooks that Iceland and Norway are seeking new commercial markets for their whale products, both domestically and overseas, and have no legal barriers to expanding their whaling in the future to meet new demand.
- Ignores the interest of other nations in resuming, or commencing, commercial whaling and trade.
- Would allow whaling to resume based on a promise from Japan with absolutely no international oversight or control.

Sue Fisher, WDCS Whaling Campaigner says, "*This package rejects, ignores or postpones a host of details that are crucial to its success, making it ridiculously dangerous to proceed*".

### **The relevance of whaling in the 21st Century**

The long and infamous history of commercial whaling has demonstrated that it is impossible to ensure that commercial hunts are properly regulated, sustainable and humane.

Even after 60 years of research, restrictions by the IWC and huge public interest, there remains:

- no humane way to kill a whale at sea,
- no mechanism (that the whaling nations are willing to accept) to ensure compliance with effective regulations,
- no scientific certainty about the ability of whale stocks to withstand hunting in the face of growing environmental threats including climate change.

Considering these factors, the unique vulnerability of whales to over-hunting, and the fact that commercial whaling meets no pressing nutritional need in the three developed countries still conducting it, WDCS argues that it is time to consign this practice to history.

### **Japan – 'scientific whaling'**

Japan conducts large-scale, commercial whaling by exploiting a loophole in the IWC's founding treaty that allows whaling for scientific research.

By increasing its self-allocated quotas and threatening to kill new species, Japan is defying world opinion and ignoring the pleas of the IWC which has adopted over 40 resolutions denying the validity and necessity of the hunts. In this way, Japan uses its so-called 'scientific whaling' to put pressure on the IWC to lift the moratorium.

Last year, Japan allocated itself a quota of 1,225 whales including; annual research quotas for 10 sperm, 100 sei, 50 Bryde's and 120 minke whales in the North Pacific, plus up to 935 minkes and 10 fin whales in an area of Antarctica designated a whale sanctuary by the IWC in 1994. A hunt of 50 humpback whales was scheduled to begin in late 2007, but was postponed. WDCS believes the purpose of including humpbacks was to use these iconic animals as a 'bargaining tool'.

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The results of Japan's 'scientific research' are rarely published or submitted to independent peer review and the IWC's Scientific Committee has repeatedly challenged the scientific value of the research.

Despite concerns about the impact of the hunts on the populations targeted, Japan also kills tens of thousands of small whales and dolphins annually, including in Small Type Whaling (STW) hunts (characterised by the use of small boats, hunting small whales on day trips). These hunts are not regulated by the IWC. However, the compromise deal would award the four STW towns a five year minke whaling quota, in addition to their existing hunts of small whales and dolphins, for local consumption only.

Japan currently sells around 7,500 tons of edible whale meat annually from 'scientific' hunts, small whale and dolphin hunts and 'bycatch'. Demand continues to fall and consumption of whale meat per person has dropped from about 2,000 grams in 1967 to about 50 grams in 2005. Early in 2009, shops in Japan had to reduce whale meat prices by half to move stockpiles; more than 3,000 tonnes of frozen whale meat was still in storage at the close of 2008.

#### **Norway – whaling under 'objection'**

Norway carries out the world's largest commercial whale hunt, continuing to kill minke whales in the North Atlantic since 1993 through a legal 'Objection' lodged against the moratorium in 1982. The 'objection' serves to exempt Norway from the ban, although it is against the spirit of the moratorium.

Norway has increased its self-allocated quota at an alarming rate in recent years, from 670 in 2004 to 1,052 for the last three years. The total quota for 2009 has been set at 885 minke whales, which will be the annual base quota for the next five years (2009-2013).

In the last ten years, Norwegian whalers have fulfilled their quota only once, in 2001, when the quota was much lower at 546 minke whales. However, Norway plans to maximize the number of whales slaughtered from its hunts through a substantial change in whale hunting regulations. The Fisheries Directorate is suggesting that individual vessel quotas be removed, and that there be "open hunting" for minke whales within the overall area quotas. In the past, Norway had applied whale quotas per vessel based on the size of the ship involved in hunting.

In early February of 2009, WDCS received confirmation from the Norwegian Food Safety Authority (Mattilsynet) that it had confiscated 4320 kilos of whale meat that had been in storage at the Vomog Hundemat pet food facility in northern Norway. A Norwegian whale meat company had applied to export part of the stockpile to the Faroe Islands for human consumption.

#### **Iceland – increasing hunts**

Iceland has issued quotas for 2009 of 150 fin whales and at least 100 minke whales a year, to run from 2009 to 2013.

Iceland stopped commercial whaling in 1986 implicitly having agreed to the moratorium by not taking an objection against the decision like Norway and Japan (originally) did. They did, however, continue to pursue scientific whaling until 1989.

In 1992, Iceland left the IWC and then re-joined in 2002 with a legally-disputed reservation against the moratorium. Some countries still do not recognize Iceland's membership of the IWC. Iceland resumed 'scientific whaling' in 2003, and over the course of its five year lethal research programme, killed 200 minke whales from 2003 to 2007. It recommenced commercial whaling in 2006, and killed a total of seven endangered fin whales and one minke whale in 2006. No fin whales have been killed since 2006, but for the quota year 2007/2008, Iceland killed a total of 37 minke whales in commercial whaling, out of a quota of 40 animals.

The domestic market for whale meat in Iceland is very low and historically much of the meat from Iceland's whaling industry was exported to Japan. The Icelandic press reported early in 2007 that 179 tonnes of 'slaughter waste' representing about half of the fin whales killed in the commercial hunt had been dumped in landfills.

#### **International trade**

International trade in whale meat and products is banned under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES [www.cites.org](http://www.cites.org)). However, Norway, Iceland and Japan hold reservations against the ban and, in 2008, just as the IWC Chairman initiated the current negotiations, Norway and Iceland resumed international trade in whale meat with Japan.

Iceland has repeatedly stated its interest in re-opening trade in whale products. It first imported whale meat from Norway in 2002, a total of 24.6 tonnes. In 2006, the first export of 0.5 tonnes of whale meat from Iceland to the Faroe Islands occurred, followed by a shipment of some 90 tonnes of whale meat to the Faroes in late 2008.

In June of 2008, for the first time in almost 20 years, Japan received imported whale meat from both Norway (5 tonnes of minke whale meat) and Iceland (nearly 82 tonnes of endangered fin whale meat). The meat was initially held in customs, but was released for sale in December of 2008.

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