

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF
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AND
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“61ST ANNUAL MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION”
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE, AND OCEANS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
May 20, 2009

We have submitted this written statement to the Subcommittee in order to respond to the request that the Obama Administration provide its views on the upcoming 61st annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission.

The Obama Administration began while the Future of the IWC process was well underway. The Administration fully understands the complexities of, and concerns regarding, this process and the key issues facing the IWC. The Administration has asked the current United States Commissioner, Dr. William Hogarth to hold over in his post through the June annual meeting so that he can remain Chairman of the Commission, a position that he holds as an individual. We appreciate Dr. Hogarth’s leadership as both U.S. Commissioner and IWC Chair and his success at bringing a respectful level of discourse among the IWC members as they discuss the difficult issues facing the IWC. We expect the President to appoint a new U.S. Commissioner to replace Dr. Hogarth following the end of this year’s IWC meeting.

As we have stated earlier, the Administration would like to see the International Whaling Commission (IWC) serve as the premier international forum to resolve current and emerging whale conservation issues and coordinate critical research. In this context, conservation of whales is of the utmost priority to the Obama Administration. Most importantly, the United States continues to view the commercial whaling moratorium as a necessary conservation measure because the abundance of most whale stocks are either too unknown, too low, or still recovering, and there is not yet an effective, comprehensive conservation scheme for whales that will guarantee their survival.

The Administration also strongly opposes lethal scientific whaling and considers it unnecessary in modern whale conservation management, and believes that the use of objections, reservations and an expansive interpretation of Article VIII (special permit scientific whaling) undermine the moratorium and the institution. The Administration

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moreover has significant concerns over the recent resumption of international trade of whale meat with imports by Japan, and exports by Iceland and Norway.

Nevertheless, the Administration is committed to furthering discussions of critical issues within the IWC because it is important for the IWC to function effectively. The IWC should be a model for international cooperation on the conservation and use of a shared global resource. It is important for us now to try to find common ground among IWC members, which are many of the same nations with whom we need to cooperate on even more urgent international environmental matters. However, we reserve judgment on various proposals regarding a way forward on the IWC until discussions are completed, which, in our view must occur before the annual meeting in 2010. The time to resolve these issues is now. It is our view that any resolution of outstanding issues, to be acceptable, must result in a significant improvement in the conservation status of whales and be based on sound science.

In closing, the failure to resolve these issues is not an acceptable outcome to the United States. We intend to use the Administration's influence to achieve a resolution by 2010 that will ensure the long term functioning of the IWC, and greater protections for the world's great whales.