

January 26, 2009

BY ELECTRONIC MAIL, TELEFAX, AND REGULAR MAIL



The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of our millions of members and supporters nationwide and the overwhelming majority of Americans who care deeply about Earth's great whales, we write to congratulate you on your inauguration and to encourage you and your administration to immediately renew the United States' leadership position in whale conservation. Our organizations, which are all members of the Whales Need US coalition, are eager to work with and support your administration in renewing United States leadership at the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and in other fora to address the many urgent threats facing whales and their marine habitat. The dangers posed by climate change, environmental pollution, deep-sea drilling, and misguided proposals for commercial whaling require urgent action by the United States government.

For more than four decades, from President Nixon through President Clinton, under both Republican and Democratic Congressional majorities, the United States consistently played a critical and preeminent role in whale conservation. Sadly, this proud bi-partisan legacy has been seriously jeopardized by your predecessor's administration, which has pursued policies sharply at odds with the strongly held views of the American people and their elected representatives. Indeed, actions taken by the Executive branch of the Bush administration and a former member of the U.S. Senate have weakened long-established policies for endangered marine mammals, resulting in confused and ineffectual representation by the U.S. delegation at the IWC, the pre-eminent forum for the protection of the great whales. These policies have also undermined the leadership role of the U.S. within the IWC.

Specifically, the outgoing Bush administration has, inexplicably, sought to undermine and compromise historic and hard-won international protections for whales – including the IWC moratorium on commercial whaling and the Southern Ocean Sanctuary for Whales – through a secretive negotiating process launched by Dr. William Hogarth, the U.S. IWC Commissioner, in his role as the elected chairman of the IWC. Dr. Hogarth, unless replaced by your administration, will complete his three-year term in June 2009.

Bush Administration support for achieving a compromise "package" acceptable to the last three whaling nations – Japan, Iceland and Norway – has stilled America's voice at the IWC and threatens to reverse decades of steady progress. That progress includes 21 years of unambiguous U.S. Government support for the IWC commercial whaling moratorium, the single most effective whale conservation instrument ever achieved.

As advanced by Dr. Hogarth under the direction of the Bush Administration, the compromise package would legitimize ongoing whaling by Japan, Iceland and Norway while also expanding whaling to coastal waters. A compromise would, moreover, open the door for a host of other nations to seek similar allowances thereby expanding commercial hunting threats to great whales worldwide.

The upcoming IWC Intersessional meeting in March 2009, and the subsequent 61st annual IWC meeting in Madeira, Portugal in June, will be pivotal in determining the future of the IWC and the level of international legal protection afforded the world's great whales. U.S. conservation leadership has never been more critical. Now is not the time for the United States to entertain, let alone to spearhead, proposals to weaken the moratorium on commercial whaling.

We urge you and your administration to reclaim the legacy of U.S. leadership at the IWC and rally member nations to maintain and build on the existing commercial whaling moratorium. Specifically, we urge your administration to:

- Immediately review and provide new instructions to the U.S. Commissioner and the United States delegation to the IWC;
- Ensure that your administration returns to the time-honored practice of designating the Director of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) as the United States IWC Commissioner;
- Explicitly rule out U.S. support for any initiative or policy in which the IWC or its scientific committee agrees to approve Special Permit catches or any version of "Coastal Whaling" or legitimize any other or new form of whaling not currently allowed under the existing IWC framework or through any modification of that framework, thereby legitimizing such catches and undermining the existing moratorium;
- Reaffirm the United States' commitment to uphold and strengthen the commercial whaling moratorium and delineate specific steps to accomplish this objective;
- Work together with other nations to modernize the IWC in line with other international conservation treaties by inter alia expanding participation by civil society, closing loopholes in the whaling convention currently being exploited by whaling nations, and adding meaningful enforcement mechanisms to the treaty;
- Use U.S. diplomatic, political, legal and economic influence to curb the escalation of whaling by Japan and the continued whaling by Norway and Iceland and to seek cessation of these activities;
- Work constructively with other IWC member countries to support and encourage them to pursue non-lethal marine mammal research and economic activities -- such as responsible whale watching -- which offer greater benefits for coastal communities in the United States and worldwide.

We are eager to meet with appropriate representatives of your Administration including Secretary of State nominee Hilary Clinton, the Secretary of Commerce nominee, NOAA Administrator nominee Dr. Jane Lubchenco, and Council on Environmental Quality Chair nominee Nancy Sutley to assist in advancing these priorities in advance of the upcoming IWC Intersessional meeting in March and the 61st annual IWC meeting in June.

Thank you for your attention to this matter at such a busy time. We look forward to working with you and your administration over the weeks, months and years ahead to renew and enhance our nation's leadership and positive influence on this important international conservation issue.

If you have any questions about this issue or would like to reach the Whales Need US coalition please contact D.J. Schubert, Wildlife Biologist, Animal Welfare Institute, P.O. Box 3650, Washington, DC 20027; telephone (609) 601-2875; e-mail: dj@awionline.org.

Sincerely,

Whales Need US Coalition

On behalf of:

American Cetacean Society
Animal Welfare Institute
Cetacean Society International
The Cousteau Society
Dolphin Connection
Environmental Investigation Agency
Greenpeace USA
The Humane Society of the United States
International Fund for Animal Welfare
International Marine Mammal Project of the Earth Island Institute
Natural Resources Defense Council
Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society
The Whaleman Foundation

cc: Ms. Hilary Clinton, Secretary of State
Mr. Otto Wolff, Asst. Secretary and Chief Financial Officer, U.S. Dept. of Commerce
Dr. Jane Lubchenco, NOAA Administrator nominee
Ms. Nancy Sutley, Chairwoman, Council on Environmental Quality