



**Opening Statement to the 59th Meeting of the International Whaling
Commission
June 2007**

Increasing Threats

Since the moratorium went into effect in 1986, over 24,000 whales have been killed and their meat sold commercially. Special permit whaling has increased from 540 whales killed in the 1995/96 season to 1282 whales killed in the 2005/06 season. Norway's commercial whale hunt has increased from 388 whales in 1995/06 to 639 whales in 2005/06. For the current 2006/07 season, Iceland has added a commercial hunt with plans to kill 30 minke and 9 fin whales. Iceland has already killed 7 fin whales. This comprises the quantifiable impacts from hunting upon the world's great whale species in recent years, and gives some sense of what they will face in the years ahead.

In addition to these figures, we must take account of other pressures bearing on whale survival. Of these factors, virtually none looms as large as global climate change. The effects of global warming are as evident here in Alaska as anywhere else, and it is proper that we frame our discussions at this 59th Meeting of the IWC with the urgency that this great challenge requires.

In past years, this body has discussed such topics as quotas, fisheries, sovereign rights, sanctuaries, whale watching, indigenous culture, economic benefits, and cruelty, and each of these remains important. Now, however, wisdom dictates that we examine each one of them within the framework of concern over the likelihood of adverse variations in the natural environment. While none of us can predict with certainty what is to come, the mounting evidence concerning global warming does not foretell a promising future, in the absence of positive action.

Scientists believe that global warming will dramatically affect whales and other migratory species. This may include habitat destruction and transformation, changes in prey distribution and prey shortages, and increased strandings. Temperature change will likely affect migration patterns, too, exerting a severe impact on breeding and feeding and making whales even more vulnerable to illness and injury.

We hope all would agree that the implications of climate change for cetacean populations should be an important focus for the work of the Commission in the coming years. HSI urges member countries to support the fullest possible analysis of the effects of global warming on cetacean populations and the cumulative impact that such changes could have in conjunction with other threats.

Those threats are the other human-induced impacts on whale survival -- pollution and degradation of habitat, emerging diseases, marine noise, ship strikes, and commercial fishing, which disrupts the balance of the ecosystem and puts whales at risk of entanglement and by-catch. With these hazards increasing each year, it would be irresponsible of the Commission to consider lifting the ban on commercial whaling.

Especially in light of what we are learning about the probable course of global climate change, we have a collective obligation to take a precautionary approach. Never have we been so clearly in need of the goodwill of the whaling countries. Never before have we so needed their commitment to the commercial whaling moratorium. Never before have we set such a high value on the desire to see them honor their international obligations.

Modernization and Tourism – The Way Forward

The proposal that the IWC amend the Convention to seal its loopholes and modernize its provisions is not a new one, but it is one that has particular urgency in light of the intensification of the pressures enumerated above. In taking this path, the IWC could send a clear signal to the world that its member nations understand the special menace of the current era, an era of melting glaciers, warming temperatures, and accelerating species extinction. It is a moment that calls for sacrifice and concession. By introducing measures for better enforcement and compliance similar to other fishery agreements, by constraining the right to issue special permits and to whale under reservation/objection according to the ICRW, this body would be taking the credible, effective, and noble steps that this unfolding environmental crisis demands.

This is the position of HSI, and the one we commend to others. Let us narrow the opportunities for mischief, let us adopt enforcement mechanisms that strengthen the IWC and its international reputation, and let us work together to provide the protection that is necessary for whales as well as for the natural environment that we all -- whales, humans, and other species -- rely upon for our survival.

There is one economic activity that, properly conducted and regulated, promises to bring great benefits not only to whales but to many of the nations represented here, and that is whale watching. The delight that people experience in seeing whales, the spark of conscience concerning the need to protect their marine habitats, and the deeper knowledge of whales and the ocean that results from

ecological tourism -- all are worthy and fitting goals for a body of this stature. It is our sincere wish that responsible whale watching will continue to receive the broadest possible backing within the IWC for the benefits it brings to coastal communities, for the educational value it brings to the human population of the world, and for the conservation gains it has produced. Since the late 1980s, whale watching has grown rapidly with 12 percent annual growth through most of the 1990s -- a rate three to four times the growth rate of overall tourism (Hoyt 2001). A well-managed and regulated whale watching industry would help to meet the goals of whale preservation, economic benefit, and conscientious stewardship of the natural environment. With the IWC's strong support, this industry can become a symbol of human resolve and hope, and a boon to whales, in the challenging decades that lie ahead.

Promoting the protection of all animals worldwide

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