



Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition

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Statement by Sidney Holt, Observer for the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition (ASOC) on behalf of non-governmental organizations concerned with the conservation of the Antarctic and its resources participating in the Annual Meeting of the International Whaling Commission IWC in Madeira, June 2009.

Mr Chairman, Delegations and Observers,
My name is Sidney Holt. I am observer for the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition, ASOC. But I am honoured to have been chosen to address you by the NGOs here concerned with animal welfare, conservation and the environment.

We intend to be pro-active, not merely re-active. We wish to focus on the future of whales and the ecosystems they inhabit, not just the future of the IWC. Still, we want the IWC to survive.

By the way, this is a multiple anniversary year.

It's important to me because I first became involved with the IWC exactly half a century ago - 1959. It was decided then that Antarctic baleen whale catches would be reduced to sustainable levels, by 1964 at the latest, in accordance with scientific advice to be provided by three independent scientists of which I was one.. But that reduction didn't happen until the early 1970s.

Then, 2009 is the thirtieth anniversary of the creation of the Indian Ocean Whale Sanctuary. Next month the first symposium on the cetaceans of the region will be held in The Maldives, attended mostly by young scientists from the region.

Most importantly it's exactly eighty years since the eminent Argentine international lawyer, José Leon Suárez, proposed to the League of Nations that a sanctuary for whales be established in the Antarctic. Suarez reported that if nothing were done the fin, blue and humpback whales would be practically exterminated in the Southern Hemisphere. That took rather longer than he thought it would, but it had happened by 1959.

Then the sei whale resource was plundered in the 1960s.

Demolition of the minke whales was begun in the 1970s.

The biomass of the still numerous minke whales is less than one percent of the biomass of the Southern Hemisphere baleen whales at the time Suarez reported to the League of Nations.

Think about that. We're talking endlessly about how to sweep up the crumbs left on the table after the feast. If anything's dysfunctional, that's it.

All the NGOs for which I speak unreservedly support at this time the continuation of the moratorium, with no arbitrary catch limits being set. But they think it's time to move on: to end all commercial whaling under unilaterally issued Special Permits, all whaling in sanctuaries, all whaling under objections. And all international trade in commodities from Appendix I CITES-listed species.

An end is justified by the improvement of scientific knowledge about whales, using non-lethal methods, and by the increase in scale and extent of non-lethal uses of whales. Furthermore, increases in threats to the survival and welfare of whales - resulting from the intensifying and growing diversity of human activities in and around the ocean - mean that relieving the ecological stress caused by whaling is now even more urgent.

The wondrous, vulnerable whales will never contribute substantially to the food security of humans. Nor do they threaten it. Despite insistent propaganda they're not responsible for the troubles of the fishing industry.

Commercial whaling is now unnecessary, is inhumane, and is even unprofitable, continuing – subsidized - for minimal financial gain.

Nevertheless, we in civil society insist on being conciliatory and constructive. The three-year phase-in of zero catch limits after 1982 allowed six whaling countries to make the social and economic adjustments needed to fold their operations. That should be long enough now for a phase-down, and –out, of residual commercial whaling. The catches in that period should be fewer than in recent seasons; no new whaling vessels should be brought into service, and no new whaling operations begun. The phase-down and -out should be fair to the whaling countries that did abide by the IWC's 1982 decision. Intransigence should not be rewarded.

If you decide to extend the life of the Small Working Group we suggest you revise its terms of reference to include consideration of this option. And some other useful things could be started during the phase-down and -out.

They include resuming negotiations for revising the ICRW

And also launching more research - as promised to the United Nations in 1972 – on the recovery of the whale populations and ecosystems that were severely impacted by poorly regulated commercial whaling, as well as to gain more knowledge about the new threats to cetaceans.

Those are our suggestions, from all six continents and many small island states, including from all whaling countries. .

A fuller version of them can be made available to delegations and to the media in the normal way. It is also posted on the ASOC website.

Thank you.