



INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION

IWC 62 Report 2010: Agadir, Morocco

By Paul Spong

A CRUCIAL MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION

This year's meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) is shaping up as the most crucial in the history of the organisation, which was formed in 1946, and tasked with the role of protecting both whales and the whaling industry. In the years since 1946, the Commission has seen some species of great whales pushed to the brink of biological extinction, and others into "commercial" extinction, while the whaling industry, once so mighty, faded and almost died. In 1982, the IWC decided to impose an indefinite moratorium on commercial whaling, which has been helpful to the nascent recovery of some critically endangered species and populations. The full restoration of the role of whales in ocean ecosystems is still a long way off, and may never happen, but the signs of progress are encouraging. It comes as a shock, therefore, to realise that the whaling moratorium, which came as a beacon of hope for the environmental movement, and was so difficult to achieve, is now itself endangered. In Agadir, Morocco, members of the IWC are now gathering, to consider allowing commercial whaling to resume, including in the Antarctic Whale Sanctuary. There is a significant probability that the Commission will agree. This blog will follow events as they unfold.



ONCE MORE UNTO THE BREACH

There's a déjà vu quality to the scene that surrounds the days before the opening of this year's meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC). It happens to be in Agadir, Morocco, and like other venues of late, a casino is next door, so a rolling of the dice analogy comes easily to mind. Both "sides" are intensely involved in pre-meeting discussions and

negotiations, from which media witnesses have been entirely excluded. NGOs have been invited to some of the sessions, and at times a few have even been allowed to voice brief opinions, but little in the way of clarity about what is really happening has emerged. The “deal” which would see the renewal of legally sanctioned commercial whaling and effectively end the moratorium, that took effect in 1986, is apparently still very much in play. Leading the effort to achieve the whaling equivalent of “peace in our time” are New Zealand and the USA. Both are surprising participants, given that Candidate for President Obama made an unqualified promise to strengthen the moratorium on commercial whaling, and that New Zealand has long been in the forefront of efforts to bring an end to the dark days of the whaling era.

As a New Zealander who has spend much of his life abroad, I have never been more proud of my home country than in meetings of the IWC, when New Zealand's impassioned defence of whales, and opposition to their wanton slaughter, was a lynchpin of the hope that people around the world held for their future – that whales will soon see a day in which they no longer face the threat of bloody death at the hands of men who see them only as objects to destroy, render and sell. I recall the entire New Zealand delegation standing to deliver a vigorous Haka as part of their plea, and the words used by the New Zealand Commissioner in commenting on the IWC's search for direction: “What the IWC needs is a moral compass”. It never occurred to me that New Zealand would desert this high ground on the field that is no less than a battle for life on our planet. But it has.

In becoming active partners in a process that will shred the environmental movement's crowning accomplishment, New Zealand and the USA have redrawn the line between defenders and exploiters of whales. Sadly, both nations now stand on the side of the whalers, apparently even agreeing to the slaughter of whales for profit within the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary. Yes, as the proponents of the deal claim, the draft agreement does reduce the number of whales that will be slaughtered over the next 10 years, but the key element and the one that Japan wants so badly, is that the killing will be legal. Japan's whalers will no longer have to hide their ugly business behind “research” placards and propoganda; they will no longer be pirates on the high seas.

In the background, research into the development of new products made from whales, including medicines, cosmetics, and feed for farmed fish goes on quietly, with dozens of new patents granted or being applied for.

See the truly grim picture of this future for whales at: http://www.wdcs.org.uk/story_details.php?select=249

How can it be, one might ask, that Japan's utterly irresponsible behaviour merits such a reward? Giving it the prize it has sought for so long is akin to a school bully being awarded a badge of merit, out of fear, a senseless act fraught with unknown consequences. What might that bully become?

As a New Zealander, I hang my head in shame, as must many of my country folk, and I am quite sure that many Americans feel ashamed of their leadership too. Collectively experiencing a sense of betrayal, we now rely on the hope that Australia and other staunch

defenders of whales will rally enough support for the cause of justice in our world's oceans, to turn back the tide. In Agadir, Morocco, on the shores of a sparkling blue Atlantic Ocean, once again, the battle is about to be joined.

“Save the whales, save the earth” is an old slogan, but it has never had more meaning than today. We stand on the brink of a precipice. Do we fall, or step back?

By Paul Spong

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Some links to additional information, news stories, videos, and suggestions for action:

- <http://www.youtube.com/user/SecondNatureStudios#p/u/2/OHn02AB5p2k> (Australia/ New Zealand PSA)
- <http://www.savethewhalesnow.com/index.php> (USA PSA)
- http://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/news/article.cfm?c_id=2&objectid=10652814
- <http://blogs.discovermagazine.com/80beats/2010/06/15/ahead-of-critical-meeting-on-whaling-japan-accused-of-buying-votes/> (Japan's vote buying exposed)
- <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/asia-pacific/2010/06/20106147137200555.html>
- <http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5jyGXoKzZgWDD3YCQM-DDrM2njZOwD9GF522G0>
- http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/asia_pacific/10358046.stm (Japanese whistleblower story)
- <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/06/17/2930032.htm> (bribery denial story)
- http://avaaz.org/en/whales_last_push/?cl=617931639&v=6635 (Avaaz petition has more than 900,000 names) <http://www.animalcampaigns.com/index.php/29/Marine-Conservation/wdcs-stop-whaling-petition.html> (WDCSpetition) http://www.wdcs.org/stop/killing_trade/index.php





THE STALLING GROUND

Day one of this year's IWC meeting lasted a scant 2 hours, including the opening entertainment and a long coffee break – at least, the part of it that was open to media and NGOs.

The rest of the day was spent behind closed doors, in private discussions intended to bring the parties to a point where they agreed enough about fundamental issues to risk

coming back into open session again. Not only are today's meetings private, tomorrow's will be too. The next time the plenary meets will be on Wednesday morning. By then, if the chairman gets his way, the die will have been cast.

There is an unreal air about the proceedings here in Agadir. Everything of substance is happening behind closed doors, with very little by way of news coming out. Most of those on the outside have nothing to do except chat, interview each other and take long lunches. One might think there was nothing going on, and some attendees are more than a little miffed at coming all this way to occupy an expensive seat they barely had time to occupy before being told to leave. Some of the NGOs felt so short changed at being hustled out of the room they felt like staging a sit in, which after the fact seemed like a good idea, as it would have been the media hit of the day.

As things turned out, about the only things for the media to grasp onto were a joint statement by Pew, WWF and Greenpeace, expressing support for a deal that ended whaling in the Antarctic, among other bottom line demands (Greenpeace was the news) and a tiny demo that happened briefly this morning, before the opening. A small group of protesters held signs at the entrance to the venue, declaring Japan's "research" whaling fake, pleading for the lives of babies in Australia's whale nursery, now threatened by oil & gas development, and demanding an end to the slaughter of whales and dolphins. A Sea Shepherd banner served as a reminder of an absent protester. Japanese delegates hurried past while their Canadian compatriot paused briefly to offer abuse. There were no arrests, and the demo soon ended peacefully. Dozens of police and military guarded the site, and paddy wagons patrolled back and forth. The demo soon over, it was on to business as usual, except that this morning really wasn't usual.

The Chairman, Antigua & Barbuda's Commissioner Anthony Livingstone, provided the audience with a lengthy explanation of the process that has been underway, intermittently for the past 2 years, and intensively for the past 2 weeks. He called on everyone to work hard and come up with a deal. Then he closed the session and the room was cleared. It's unclear

why Chairman Livingstone thinks that 2 more days of discussions behind closed doors, with even more parties involved than hitherto, might produce the outcome he seeks, but he's going for it. Given the flak he's having to take over Japan paying his hotel bill, possibly he feels more comfortable in a private room.

Tomorrow, the rumour mill will be at work. We may even hear something like news.

Posted by Paul Spong

Some links to current stories:

- http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science_and_environment/10369771.stm
- http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10653607
- http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science_and_environment/10369771.stm
- http://www.straitstimes.com/BreakingNews/Asia/Story/STIStory_543562.html
- <http://www.smh.com.au/environment/whaling-talks-move-into-hiding-20100621-ysin.html>





DARKNESS AND LIGHT

It may turn out that the decision of Chairman Livingstone to take the meeting behind closed doors for 2 days of “negotiations” was a strategic error. The (mostly) men who emerge at coffee breaks from the room they are closeted in are invariably clad in dark clothes, far too dark for this friendly climate, and do not look happy. At lunchtime, a burst of light emerged in the form of Australia’s Environment Minister Peter Garrett, who informed a press conference convened by WSPA and other NGOs “The Chair’s proposal is no longer alive”. Australia’s opposition to any deal that does not include a rapid phase down to zero of “scientific” or any other kind of whaling in the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary is well known, but it was easy to conclude from Minister Garrett’s words that Australia is not alone. Whether other nations share Australia’s vision of a future for the IWC that focuses more on whales than whaling may be known by the end of this week, but meanwhile the anxious NGO mob milling around on the

outside has cause for hope. If the “deal” is dead, it seems unlikely to be resurrected in any similar form soon, though face saving discussions may continue. The way “forward” will then consist of 2 possibilities: either the IWC will split up and vanish, or it will evolve. My bet is on the latter, i.e. that the truly important work the Commission is doing in (non-lethal) science, and in addressing urgent conservation issues such as ship strikes, ocean noise and climate change, will continue and become more and more the focus of the Commission’s work. There is hope indeed, for whales and the world’s oceans, in Australia’s vision, and I have no doubt that its vision is widely shared.

Interestingly, the absence of news to report on from the Plenary, made the periphery of the meeting attractive enough to the substantial media contingent still present, to focus intense attention on what might otherwise have been smaller stories. In mid afternoon, when the Plenary would normally have been in session, commanding most of the media attention, Avaaz.org presented it’s now 1,000,000 plus petition against renewed commercial whaling to Minister Peter Garrett, who accepted it on behalf of the uncounted citizens of the world who care about whales. The petition took just 5 weeks to reach the million mark, and is still growing rapidly, a fact that left a clear impression on the media swarm that surrounded the event. Garrett himself also left a clear impression, speaking with clarity and energy about the issues facing whales and the IWC. Ultimately, he had to cut the questioning short and headed off to his next meeting with a covey of cameras following him.

A short time later, another well-attended press conference occurred, in which Greenpeace Japan’s Junichi Sato spoke about the corruption involved in Japan’s high seas whaling, and



the trial in which he is accused of theft of whale meat (after handing whale meat stolen by whalers to police). Despite the likelihood that he will be sentenced to 18 months in prison, Junichi was calm and steadfast, even presenting an optimistic view of Japan's future. He was joined by another Greenpeacer who defended the organisation's decision to join Pew and WWF in their attempt to steer the IWC in a direction which would see limited commercial whaling resume in return for greater control under the IWC. Many here, including most if not all of the pro-whale NGOs are puzzled, even angered by Greenpeace's stance, given the organisation's long history of opposition to commercial whaling.

Buzzing about in the background, among both media and NGOs are the stories of bribery by Japan – votes in exchange for aid, cash, and girls – that have received widespread attention in world media, and cannot help but be impacting the mood of the discussions taking place behind those closed and guarded doors. A brief press statement from the Secretariat this morning described the discussions as useful, respectful and cordial – hard to believe, but in the unreality zone we are in at this meeting, perhaps it's true.

Fortunately, Chairman Livingstone, in handing out his instructions before the Plenary broke up on Monday, asked each of the “negotiating” groups to appoint a rapporteur.

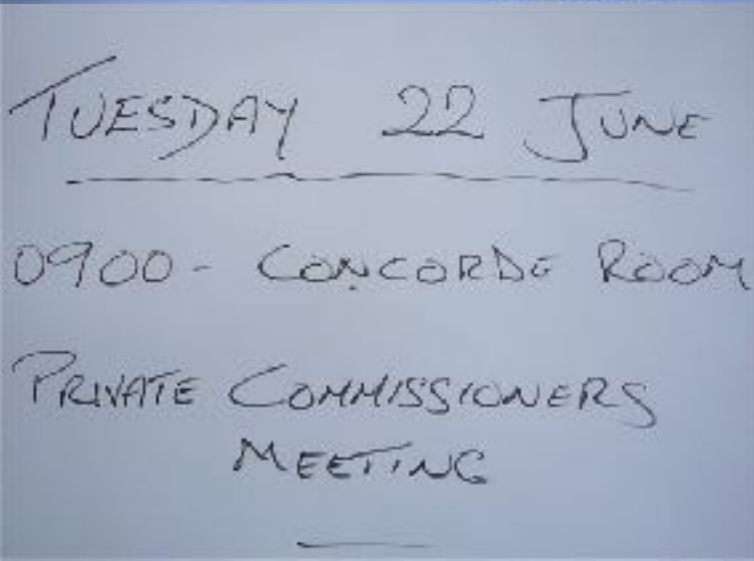
Tomorrow, we may know more about what really happened in that dark and dismal room.

Posted by Paul Spong

Links to other stories:

- <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/jun2010/2010-06-21-01.html>
- http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/science_and_environment/10362015.stm
- <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2010/0622/How-Japan-can-save-face-and-whales>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jugR9VnzDIA>
- <http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5jyGXoKzZgWDD3YCYQM-DDrM2njZOwD9GGG7GO2>







OVER THE MOON

This day ended with a reception hosted by Australia for the purpose of explaining the non-lethal scientific programme it is engaged in with other Southern Hemisphere countries. The research is

wide-ranging, creative in the

technology it uses, and very costly. Developing acoustic techniques for tracking and counting blue whales is an example. It's exciting science, and a great demonstration of the real commitment Australia is making towards forging a future for the IWC that focuses on whales, not whaling. In footing the bill, Australia is putting its money where its mouth is, proving its commitment to one and all.

The reception turned into a bit of a party, partly because wine & beer were provided along with water & soft drinks, but also because there was a tangible sense of relief among those present – pro-whale delegates and NGOs – who had emerged at the end of a long day knowing for sure that legally sanctioned commercial whaling is not about to start again. The moratorium on commercial whaling is safe for the moment. Given the extreme jeopardy the moratorium appeared to be facing when this meeting began, the knowledge was cause for celebration. It's not a stretch to say that some of those present were over the moon.

It actually took just moments at the beginning of this day for the certainty that the “deal” was dead to emerge. Chairman Livingstone, in his opening remarks, which reviewed the 10 intercessional meetings that had been held since the Commission met in Alaska 3 years ago, and the work that was done over the last 2 days, quickly revealed that many differences between parties remain unsettled, trade and “scientific” whaling among them. The tone of his comments was dour – the process had been useful in that exchanges had been cordial and frank, but no consensus had been reached. Japan led off the commentary, saying that it was willing to compromise to some extent, but unwilling to commit to zero after 10 years of legal whaling in the Antarctic.

The next 3 hours were occupied by statements from more than a score of member countries, which essentially reiterated positions they had long held. By the time the meeting broke up for lunch, the divide between pro and anti whalers seemed as deep as ever. Pretty much everyone praised the process, and the attempt, but apart from New Zealand and the USA, the anti whaling side seemed as entrenched as ever, and Japan could not bring itself to step over the line.

Following a 2-hour break, the meeting got onto routine business, starting the review of the Scientific Committee report. This is usually where IWC meetings start, but today was the afternoon of Day 3, with little time left and a long way to go. We learned that though the assessment of minke whales in the Antarctic is incomplete, the decline in their numbers is probably real and that we should know the magnitude of the decline by next year. Japan thinks that whatever number is agreed next year, there are plenty of minkes, and the small numbers it is killing won't make any difference to the population. Most humpback populations are increasing, though not all. The right whales of Patagonia are experiencing heavy mortality, which is cause for considerable concern. Western grey whales remain in serious trouble, with a tiny remnant population facing dire threats from seismic exploration in critical habitat near the Sakhalin Islands. It will not be surprising if the species soon goes extinct, like the baiji, which has finally disappeared altogether, and on the IWC's watch.

Equally dismaying was the way in which welfare issues were dealt with. Usually, they are at least on the agenda of IWC meetings, though short-changed, but this year they aren't even on the list of topics, and the committee that deals with them has not even met once during the past year. It was encouraging to hear the UK offer to conduct a workshop on welfare issues before next year's meeting, but that did little to allay the sense that the suffering whales experience at the hands of whalers matters little to the IWC. About the only bright spot in this zone is the attention that entanglements, which can involve enormous suffering, are getting. There is hope in this development, though not for the hundreds of whales that are entangled annually in Japanese and Korean fishing nets, and invariably end up dead. Regarded as "bycatch" they are sold.

Tomorrow, it must be said, is going to be a very difficult day. Apparently, the USA will try to amend the Schedule so that Aboriginal Subsistence quotas are locked in for the next 10 years. Doing so will require a 3/4 majority vote. Ordinarily, this might not be difficult to achieve, given that there is a great deal of sympathy for aboriginal needs, and the Commission generally gives aboriginal whalers what they ask for. On this occasion, however, the situation has become complicated. Denmark, on behalf of Greenland, has inserted 10 humpback whales into the table of permitted aboriginal kills. There will be some sympathy for Greenland's request in the room, but evidence that meat from whales killed for "aboriginal" purposes ends up on supermarket shelves and hotel dinner plates will also create skepticism. That may lead to resistance.

If a fight breaks out tomorrow, one casualty may be the brief opportunity NGOs have been granted to address the meeting. This was supposed to happen at the end of today, but today ran late, and the chairman has pushed the NGO slot to the end of tomorrow. Odds are on tomorrow running late too.

Posted by Paul Spong

Some story links:

- <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/jun2010/2010-06-23-01.html>

- <http://www.japantoday.com/category/national/view/iwc-members-fail-to-agree-on-curbing-japan-whale-hunt>
- <http://www.3news.co.nz/IWC-meeting-Day-three/tabid/1414/articleID/162513/Default.aspx>
- <http://www.3news.co.nz/IWC-fails-to-limit-whaling-Japan-still-hunts/tabid/1216/articleID/162474/Default.aspx>





SETTING BACK A CAUSE

Today, in handing Denmark and Greenland the victory it sought – the right to kill 27 humpback whales over the next 3 years – the IWC has inflicted a serious blow to the cause of indigenous people around the world. No-one at this meeting doubts that indigenous people have been oppressed for far too long,

that they have legitimate claims, needs and aspirations, and should be able to pursue their lives with dignity. In this room, however, there is considerable confusion as to how to honour this view. It has become quite clear, over the past several days, that Greenland's "need" is complicated. Yes, there are many communities in far flung places around Greenland where life is difficult, but there are also communities in which the standard of living is better than most places in the world. As the Commissioner for Monaco pointed out, the average household income for West Greenland, where the humpbacks will be killed, is 55,000 Euros per year.

Moreover, huge harvests of fish and shellfish occur. Added to the legal supply of meat from minke and fin whales, and the illegal killing of more than 3,000 tons of "small cetaceans" annually, the conclusion is easily drawn that there is more than enough food for the people of West Greenland. Well documented commercial sales emphasise the point, and no "needs" statement has been provided. The question arises then, why insist, to the point of causing a possible rupture in the the IWC, on killing humpback whales? There is no need.

The debate that led to the decision today was long and difficult. Thanks to an insulting intervention by the Commissioner for St. Kitts & Nevis, Daven Joseph, a fight almost broke out. Chairman Livingstone twice suspended the open discussion to allow private discussions between groups – one between Denmark & the EU, and another between countries opposed – and eventually got his way, as did Denmark and Greenland.

The decision was by "consensus". This is a sad day, not just for the humpback whales of the north Atlantic, but for indigenous people collectively, because the decision of the IWC will make it more difficult for other indigenous people to pursue their legitimate claims. When one charade succeeds, others will be tempted. How will future legitimate and illegitimate claims be discriminated? Quite possibly, not easily.

Greenlanders may be celebrating this day, but their indigenous brethren may rue it.

Posted by Paul Spong



IT ISN'T OVER

There was a palpable sense of relief today, at 6:43pm, when the 62nd Annual Meeting of the International Whaling Commission finally adjourned. There was no decision about a venue for the next meeting. It has been a long and difficult road. This is not to say that Morocco,

Agadir, the beach, the promenade, the sunset, the balmy air and friendly people were difficult – indeed, they are all quite marvellous – but rather that sitting in a large cool room engaged in looped discussions about the fate of whales does tend to wear on one. Probably because the USA's bowhead proposal had disappeared during lunch, this afternoon's session moved along smoothly in a neutral zone, with the report of the Finance and Administration Committee. This was followed by presentation of a document prepared by Chairman Livingstone that contained his vision of "the way forward". He didn't entertain discussion, but it's clear that he's not giving up. For the moment at least, however, no-one is buying in. We will see.

It will not be at all surprising to see the promoters of this year's deal coming back around next year, with the same idea dressed in slightly different clothing. It all feels quite reminiscent of the days a decade ago when The Irish Proposal, equally scary, was on the table, driving everyone to distraction. Eventually it went away, but until it disappeared, it created a lot of work and heartache.

We can fully expect that the effort to hand over the moratorium in exchange for whales' lives will continue, but we can also expect the mob to resist. The mob, by the way, or at least its energetic fringe, was very much present at this meeting. A small group of protesters maintained a vigil on the street outside the venue for the entire week. They were creative, cheerful, persistent, and their messaging was very much to the point – no whaling, no killing of whales, period. Today, they sang for the entire time the meeting was in session. No-one inside heard.

Possibly the most constructive suggestion of the day came from Australia, who proposed that the work of the Scientific Committee and the Commission should occur at separate times of the year. Several speakers supported the idea, but it soon got bogged down with dates and scheduling, so it will come back around next year.

The highlight of the afternoon session was a touching farewell to IWC Secretary Nicky Grandy, complete with a song by the Russian Commissioner that brought the house to its feet. In the

post for the past 10 years, Dr. Grandy has handled the organisation with impressive skill, managing somehow to wrestle it into a group where opponents do not attack each other on sight. Her successor, Simon Brockington, had a pretty good introduction to his role at this meeting, and by now must understand something of the swamp he is walking into. He is a very cheerful fellow, optimistic too, possibly just what this tired old (IWC) body needs... new blood.

Posted by Paul Spong

Links to other stories:

- http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/richardblack/2010/06/whale_deal_falls_but_who_wins.html
- <http://www.kansascity.com/2010/06/25/2044778/conference-to-allow-greenland.html>
- <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gtzNn98VxBXuf17sxb75zWKrduEA>
- <http://green.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/06/25/enemy-of-the-good-the-whaling-stalemate/>







WRAP-UP: A BULLET DODGED

This year's 62nd meeting of the International Whaling Commission, held in Agadir Morocco, will go down as a failed attempt to restart legally sanctioned commercial whaling. The attempt occurred under the banner of saving some whales' lives, and bringing some of the worst aspects of present-day whaling under IWC control. Had the "deal" been agreed to, Japan's so-called "scientific" whaling, under which it presently issues unlimited permits to itself and sells the product, would have required approval from the IWC's Scientific Committee, and the Commission itself. Closing this loophole would have been a huge step towards fixing one of the major problems with the 1946 treaty under which the IWC was formed. Another very desirable element of the "consensus package" on offer was the closure of international trade in whale products. Getting agreement about this would have also represented a huge step forward. But the price was too high. Abandoning the moratorium, and allowing the legal killing of whales for commercial profit again, would have opened the door to a potentially unending, bleak future for whales in which they are once again regarded as no more than objects of gruesome commerce. So much of the world has moved on from this view of whales that it is now receding rapidly, as if falling behind in a rear view mirror, and despite the dying that is happening and will come, there is real cause for optimism.

Having failed at this attempt to reinvent commercial whaling, despite surprising support from the opposing side, it is now very much in Japan's hands to determine what happens next. It is hard to imagine that Japan's government, or people, have much stomach for an endless fight in which they always appear in the blackest hats and darkest suits. Yet there are matters of principal and national pride involved, which are enormously important to any nation, and perhaps more so to Japan than most others. Finding a solution to the puzzle of how to end whaling without creating "losers" was a large part of the motivation of many who participated in the discussions that led to the now rejected "package". Though it is possible the "deal" may return in modified form at next year's meeting, after Chairman Livingstone's proposed "time out for reflection" it seems very unlikely to succeed. Japan, therefore, has a very serious decision to make. Perhaps, with the end of JARPA II (Japan's Antarctic "research whaling" programme) in 2011, Japan may find reason to pause and reflect. After 23 years of data collection, such a pause would be natural, and not forced. If Japan chooses, this could be a honourable way out of an increasingly difficult dilemma, and bring relief to all sides.

Meanwhile, it needs to be stressed that the IWC is by no means “dysfunctional” as is claimed by those who would go back to the “good old” whaling days again. In fact, the work of the Scientific Committee and Conservation Committee is stellar in many ways, and very important to the fate of whales and the oceans of our planet. Key issues being addressed include noise, ship strikes, entanglements, ecosystem integrity, and climate change. All of these are the subject of focused discussions within these committees when they meet annually, and as well, numerous workshops are scheduled, sometimes years in advance, to which experts from around the world are invited to contribute their specialised knowledge. Altogether, the work of these committees provides real cause for optimism about the future of the IWC, whales, and our critically endangered oceans.

It was very interesting to note, at the same time as media stories regretful of the meeting’s outcome appeared, a little flurry of stories that gave prominent press space to arguments favouring whales’ rights to life. Brain size and complexity, self-awareness, complex functioning societies, and sophisticated communication are items on a lengthy list of cetacean attributes that argue the case for them being regarded, and treated, as “beings” rather than as mere animals. Cetaceans are not alone in this zone, as higher primates and elephants are found there too.

We shall see, as time passes, whether this divergent view manages to penetrate the thought barrier that is the IWC wall.

If it does, a conversation I had with St. Kitts & Nevis’ Commissioner Daven Joseph may come to mind. We found ourselves sitting next to each other on the bus ride out to the Air Maroc plane at Agadir airport. We shook hands and soon acknowledged being on opposite sides of the debate. Talking about the meeting’s failure, he expressed hope that compromise would be possible in the future; I said, “Actually, Daven, I want us all to end up on the same side”. I do believe, that one day, we will.

Posted by Paul Spong

July 3, 2010

Links to related stories:

- http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/richardblack/2010/06/whale_deal_falls_but_who_wins.html
- <http://www.kansascity.com/2010/06/25/2044778/conference-to-allow-greenland.html>
- <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gtzNn98VxBXuf17sxb75zWKrduEA>
- <http://green.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/06/25/enemy-of-the-good-the-whaling-stalemate/>



