

On behalf of Dr. Peter Bridgewater and the Pew Environment Group, I'd like to welcome you all to Lisbon. I'd like to thank Charles Buchanan and our hosts at the Luso-American Foundation who have welcomed us with open arms and made this meeting possible in so many different ways. I would also like to thank the government of Portugal which has been so helpful and supportive of us over the past several months. To the members of our Secretariat and the observers, thank you as well. Many of you have travelled great distances to be here, sacrificing time with your families and colleagues, and we are very appreciative of your presence and your commitment.

Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank the members of our Commission. You all have an impressive record of conservation accomplishments, and we are delighted that you could be here with us in Lisbon this week. As you well know, our challenge is not an easy one. At the same time, it is my firm belief that we have a narrow window of opportunity to help the world community find a way forward on an issue which has deadlocked nations for several decades.

It is not a coincidence that our meeting comes less than a week after members of the IWC's Small Working Group presented some of their preliminary ideas about a way forward. It is also not a coincidence that this meeting occurs here in Portugal, only a few months before the annual meeting of the IWC in Madeira. We have intentionally and literally put the work of this Commission into the middle of the conversation among the world's nations.

Over breakfast, Ambassador Akao of Japan asked me specifically how our meeting can help the break the impasse. It is a very good question. And, in my opinion, there are several good answers. First, we are an *independent* commission that is not bound by the positions of governments. As such, our job is to be cognizant of the political and diplomatic realities, while fundamentally advancing ideas that we think will help resolve the disputes in a way that enhances whale conservation. Second, we have the benefit of gauging early reactions to the ideas of the small working group and offering suggestions to the IWC about ways to enhance the proposals. In this regard, our independent Commission can provide specific advice to the parties of the IWC, ideally structured in a way that would secure greater support from nations and key interests involved in the debates.

Our experience at the earlier Pew Whale Symposia in New York and Tokyo has also shown, as those of you who were there know very well, that the Chatham House Rule which you have all agreed to respect is very helpful to move forward.

We are indebted to Dr. Bridgewater for his commitment to this cause and his willingness to become our Chair. Thank you, Peter. We look forward to your leadership over the next several days as we begin this dialog. Thank you again to all the members of the Commission and observers who have joined us here tonight.