

Media release
60th meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC)
Santiago, Chile
23 – 27 June 2008

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EU Ministers urged to reject Greenland's request to kill humpback whales

A broad spectrum of animal welfare and conservation organizations including the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, WWF and the Pew Environment Group are today calling on EU ministers to instruct their representatives at the International Whaling Commission (IWC) to reject a proposal by Greenland for a quota of 10 humpback whales from European waters.

Denmark, on behalf of Greenland, seeks to increase Greenland's Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling (ASW) quota by ten humpback whales. Greenland claims that its growing human population needs 730 tonnes of whale meat annually and that the current quota allocated by the IWC does not meet their needs. Under new EU rules being tested for the first time at this meeting, all EU members

must vote the same way on the proposal. On the eve of the meeting, it appears that they may support it.

It would be profoundly disappointing to the European public if the first vote by the EU not only resulted in the unnecessary killing of ten European whales, but also established a dangerous precedent that ASW quotas may be used to meet commercial demand for whale meat.

Over many decades the IWC has been consistently clear that ASW is only: (1) to be practiced by **indigenous people** with a longstanding reliance on whale products to meet their **nutritional requirements** as well as to facilitate their **cultural traditions**; (2) to meet their **local subsistence needs**; and is (3) **not for commercial use**;

Greenland's hunters sell a significant proportion of the whale meat from their ASW hunts to a privately owned company in Greenland for onward sale to supermarkets all across the territory. Any member of Greenland's population of 56,000 and even visiting tourists can buy the whale meat. NGOs are concerned that this commercialization of whale meat from what is supposed to be a subsistence hunt creates a dangerous precedent. Furthermore, pointing to unused stockpiles of whale meat and Greenland's failure to hunt all the whales in its existing quota, the groups question whether Greenland has established a convincing case for killing more whales.

In a letter to each EU Environment minister today, the groups argue that it is impossible for EU member states to be satisfied that Greenland qualifies for a humpback quota. They urgently call on the Ministers to instruct their delegates attending the IWC meeting in Santiago, Chile to reject Greenland's proposal.

Notes to Editors:

For further information and interviews, please contact Fran Mallion, WDCS Press Officer in Chile on 44 7918 674388

Full copies of the letter are available on request. Please email fran.mallion@wdcs.org

NGO's signed on to the letter are as follows:

Animal Welfare Institute
Byron Whale Action Group
Campaign Whale
Cetacean Society International
Comiti Ballena Azul, Nicaragua
Cousteau Society
Earth Island Institute
Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA)
Humane Society International (HSI)
Irish Seal Sanctuary
LegaSeas International
Pew Environment Group
Polish Society for Nature Protection (SALAMANDRA)
Society for the Conservation of Marine Mammals (GSM)
Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS)
Whales Alive
World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA)
WWF

For its entire 60 year history, the IWC has regulated whaling by indigenous people to meet nutritional subsistence and cultural needs separately from whaling for profit (commercial whaling). The IWC awards Greenland an ASW quota of 212 minke whales, 19 fin whales, and 2 bowhead whales. Greenland claims that these whales do not provide enough to meet their needs and now seeks a total of 730 tons annually.

Greenland rarely takes its full quota of whales awarded by the IWC. For example, since 1990, Greenland has taken an average of only 14 fin whales per year out of an available quota of 19 annually. Based on Greenland's own figures, this represents 50 tonnes of meat a year that is available to Greenland but not realised. This is the equivalent of five humpback whales.

The IWC specifies that the meat and products are to be used "exclusively for local consumption", Greenland interprets 'local' to mean the whole of Greenland. Accordingly, whale products are available for purchase in supermarkets across Greenland to every one of its 56,000 people and visiting tourists, not just its Inuit community. New evidence from market surveys in Greenland also indicates that significant profits are being realised by private companies from the retail sale of whale products.

Greenland calculates its quota on the basis that one minke whale yields two tonnes of meat; one humpback yields eight tonnes of meat and one fin whale yields ten tonnes of meat. However, Greenland's need is satisfied by whale blubber as well as meat. Despite this, the two, eight and ten tonne conversion factors only relate to meat yield. If blubber and other edible products were included in the conversion factors, minke whales would yield a good deal more than 2 tonnes, humpbacks more than 8 tonnes and fin whales more than 10 tonnes. Accordingly, fewer – not more - whales might be needed to make up the total tonnage of 730 tonnes that Greenland claims that it needs. Before making a decision about Greenland's request for more whales, it is crucial that the IWC's Scientific Committee calculates the likely yields of meat and blubber from the stocks concerned.

Greenland kills 4,000 small whales, dolphins and porpoises annually, but does not take into account the meat and blubber that they provide when calculating its claimed need. These animals essentially 'top-up' Greenland's ASW quota. Before making a decision about Greenland's request for more whales, it is crucial that the IWC's Scientific Committee calculates the likely yields of meat and blubber from these 'small cetaceans' so that it can be taken into account by the IWC.