



The Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition

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Statement by Dr. Sidney Holt, representing the ASOC coalition of forty NGOs concerned with Antarctic and Southern Ocean matters; Global Ocean; and Ocean Sentry

Mr. Chairman,

The issues discussed here concerning the Southern Ocean and also scientific research and advice, have been discussed for some time among ASOC members; my comments now reflect those discussions, but in the context of statements made here today by some delegations.

First, it is the position of all member groups of ASOC that any endorsement of any whale catching in the South Ocean, under whatever IWC procedure, is completely unacceptable.

Second, any setting of arbitrary catch limits elsewhere, to satisfy the proposed commercial or research “needs” of whaling countries, would represent a lamentable return to the IWC practice of pre-1964, and would bring further discredit to the Commission.

Furthermore, it is not sufficient to provide that any such limits would take into account scientific advice, for two reasons: first, it has become the practice of whaling nations to take account of only the advice from their own scientists; the Commission should formally take advice from its Scientific Committee, though not necessarily exclusively. Second, it should be provided that the Commission will in principle act on that advice; unfortunately the IWC has a long history of receiving scientific advice and then ignoring it, setting catch limits other than those advised, simply to meet the demands of the industry.

Frequent reference has been made to setting some limits in accordance with the RMP. But, although the Scientific Committee recommended a thoroughly tested procedure, drawn up in strict accordance with the instructions of the Commission regarding management principles, it was accepted by the Commission but not incorporated in the Schedule. In legal terms, an RMP does not yet formally exist – it is simply described in an as yet unpublished report of the IWC. Furthermore, one whaling country that has said it regulates its whaling under objections to two IWC decisions, using the RMP, has in fact first doubled, then tripled, its unilateral catch numbers by changing the parameter values and other features of the RMP as tested by the SC in order to satisfy its whalers’ demands¹ Any numbers now agreed should be derived from calculations to be made by the SC using the originally agreed version of the RMP.

¹ This has been fully explained in a published paper authored by V. Papastavrou and J. Cooke, the designer of the RMP.

Several delegates have referred to the need for fairness and equity in any decisions to be made as an outcome of the current discussions. It should be remembered that five Member states (four of whom had opposed the 1982 “moratorium” decision – three of which were exploiting the whales that feed in the Southern Ocean), nevertheless did not object to it and ceased their whaling activities within the prescribed three-year delay in its implementation. Any decision now that effectively rewards those Members that continued whaling (using loopholes in the ICRW 1946) for their persistence in doing so, cannot be said to be fair to those states that abided by the IWC’s decision.

Lastly, it must be said that to think the situation regarding the Southern Ocean will be essentially unchanged in ten years from now, or even in five years, is unreasonable. Here are three reasons:

First, the food of the baleen whales and other relatively large species of marine animals – krill – is now being exploited commercially and that industry is expected to grow rapidly.

Second, environmental changes are occurring more rapidly than had been expected even two years ago. A case in point is the breaking away last week of huge parts of the ice tongues of glaciers, with expected changes in regional salinity and biological productivity.

Third, also only last week there were published in this country new calculations of the degree of sequestration of oceanic carbon by the populations of large whales, increasing as they recover, and particularly with respect to the rorquals, whose bodies sink to the sea bottom when they die.