

IWC passes Brazil project to protect whales

September 13 2018, by Denis Barnett



The 89-nation member International Whaling Commission has passed the non-binding "Florianopolis Declaration" - an agreement that whaling is no longer a necessary economic activity

Tempers flared at the International Whaling Commission on Thursday as it voted to back a Brazilian proposal which would safeguard the marine mammals in perpetuity, after a bitter debate.

The biennial meeting of the 89-nation body passed the host country's "Floriano Declaration" which sees whaling as no longer being a necessary economic activity.

The non-binding agreement was backed by 40 countries, with 27 pro-whaling states voting against.

"We now have an important instrument to guide our path," said Brazil's commissioner Hermano Ribeiro.

"Welcome to the future," said Nicolas Entrup of Swiss-based NGO OceanCare, calling the vote a "historical reorientation" of the organization away from the lethal exploitation of the sea animals.

The declaration—meant to enshrine a common vision for the 72-year old body—was angrily rejected by pro-whaling states. They are instead backing a Japanese proposal which envisages a "co-existence" between conservation and commercial whaling.

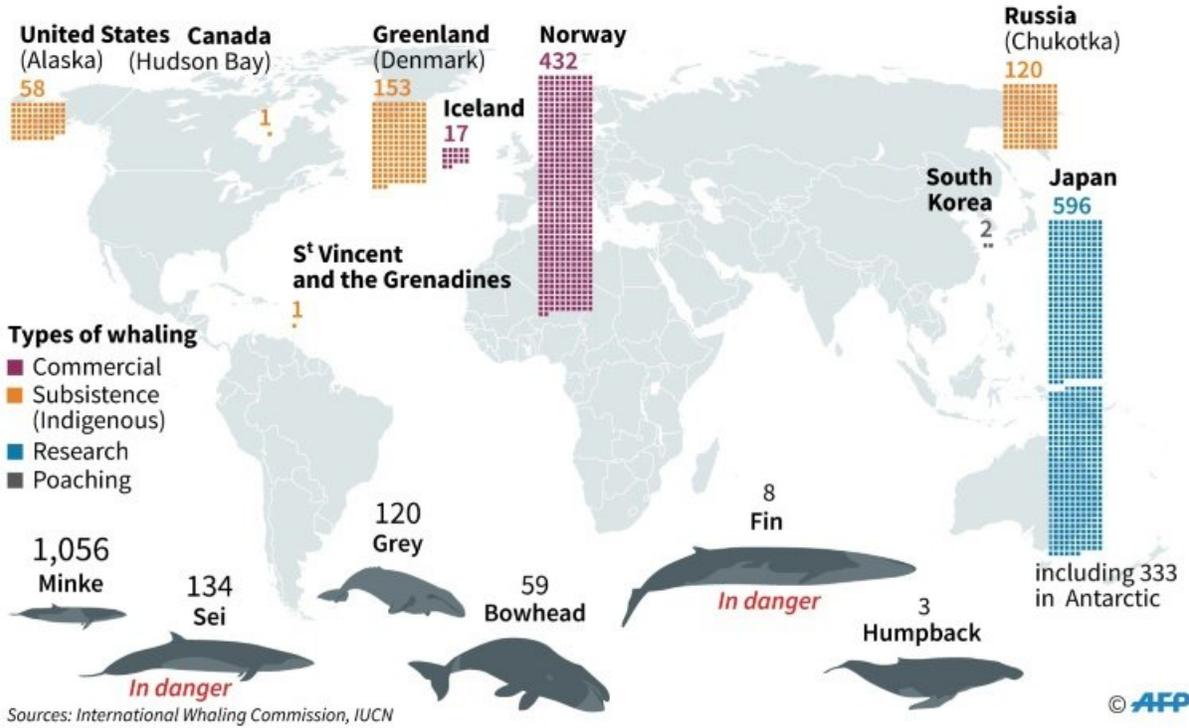
Antigua and Barbuda Commissioner Deven Joseph robustly dismissed the host country's resolution as "a non-binding, irresponsible, abnormal, inconsistent, deceptive and downright wrong resolution."

"We will never reach any sort of consensus," he told the meeting, decrying the lack of consultations which he said should have taken into account the views of pro-hunt states.

"They can take this organization and send it to the abyss where whales go when they die!"

1,380 whales caught around the world in 2017

Japan and Norway are the main whaling nations



Map locating the main whaling nations and different species of whales caught around the world in 2017

The IWC immediately began debating Japan's counter-proposal for the organization. Their "Way Forward" envisages a twin-track future of conservation and commercial whaling which would be managed by a new "Sustainable Whaling Committee".

'Science clear'

"Science is clear: there are certain species of whales whose population is healthy enough to be harvested sustainably," said the Japanese proposal put forward by its acting commissioner Hideki Moronuki. Its

commissioner Joji Morishita is currently the IWC chairman.

Japan observes an international moratorium on commercial whaling but exploits a loophole to kill hundreds of whales every year for "scientific purposes" as well as to sell the meat.

Norway and Iceland ignore the moratorium and are key supporters of Japan's bid to resume commercial whaling.

Countries on both sides of the debate on Wednesday voted to renew quotas for limited hunts for indigenous communities in Alaska, Russia, Greenland and the Caribbean—taking into account their cultural and subsistence needs.

Australia's commissioner Nick Gales pushed back against suggestions that his country's support for aboriginal whaling was at odds "with our opposition to the commerce of whaling. It is not."

Australia took Japan to the International Court of Justice in 2014 and won a ruling outlawing its "scientific program" in the southern Ocean. Japan has since started a different program.

Gales told the meeting that given "the manner and rate" of Japan's lengthy proposal to the Commission, it was difficult to escape the conclusion that the presentation had been "designed and bought forward with the intent and in the clear knowledge it will fail."



The International Whale Commission's "Florianopolis Declaration" sees whaling as no longer being a necessary economic activity

Some members have voiced fears that Japan and pro-whaling nations could leave the IWC after the meeting ends on Friday.

Gavin Carter, an ocean management consultant, said the proposal "has the feel of a final attempt to resolve issues that have dogged the IWC for decades."

He told the meeting the idea of "permanent no take" from the ocean backed by anti-whaling groups "has no precedent."

It ran counter to what UN Member States agreed with the Sustainable

Development Goals, "to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. If sustainable development is going to mean something somewhere, it has to mean something everywhere."

'Big win for whales'

Patrick Ramage, of the International Fund for Animal Welfare, said Thursday's declaration was "a big win for whales and a clear signal of intent.

"The IWC has evolved from an old whalers' club to a forward thinking conservation body. The whaling nations have not moved on."

St Vincent and the Grenadines, the Caribbean country whose island of Bequia has a quota to take four whales a year under the aboriginal subsistence whaling agreement, backed Japan's proposal as "a step in the right direction."

Its commissioner Edwin Snagg said Japan had "opened the window" on change within the organization, but anti-whaling nations were "slamming the door."

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