

JAPAN'S OPENING STATEMENT TO THE 67th MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION

The Government of Japan expresses its utmost appreciation to the Government of Brazil for hosting the 67th Meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) in Florianopolis with its outstanding natural beauty. Our appreciation also goes to all those who have made their efforts to prepare for this meeting, especially to the IWC Secretariat.

Japan considers that the Commission meeting this year is particularly important. Not only because we are here to discuss Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling, not only because we are here to discuss the Governance of the IWC, but because we believe that this meeting is an ideal opportunity to discuss real challenges which the IWC has been long facing and to seek its future.

For over 30 years, Japan has sincerely engaged in a series of negotiations, including the RMS negotiation and the "Future of the IWC" process, aimed at restoring the role of the IWC as a resource management organization in accordance with the objectives of the International Convention on the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW), namely "to provide for the proper conservation of whale stocks and thus make possible the orderly development of the whaling industry". This is how Japan has continued to cooperate with the IWC in seeking the resumption of sustainable use of whales based on international law and science, to this day. However, the revision of the so-called commercial whaling moratorium, which was agreed to take place "by 1990 at the latest" according to the Schedule of the Convention, has long been neglected.

67 years ago, Japan acceded to the ICRW, the convention for the conservation and management of whale resources, in pursuit of promoting sustainable whaling. As such, Japan has never taken the importance of conservation lightly. However, it is inconsistent with the objectives of the Convention to deny commercial whaling and the notion of sustainable use categorically, in disregard of the scientifically-proven abundance of certain whale species.

At the same time, we have to note there are communities around the world which consider whaling as an important element of their livelihood, culture and tradition. Japan believes that we all should give due respect to such diversity.

The problem that the IWC has been facing is clear. The IWC has not been able to make necessary decisions for the conservation and management of whale resources. The IWC has gradually turned into an intolerant organization which does not respect the diversity of views. The current situation is counter-productive for the global governance of conservation and management of whale resources.

Some say that the IWC has “evolved”. Indeed, in the past 70 years, we have seen a great increase in the number of membership, from a variety of regions with varying interests. There have also been significant developments in the work of the IWC Scientific Committee (SC), including the development of the Revised Management Procedure (RMP) and the substantial progress made in the process of comprehensive assessment to enhance our knowledge of the status of whales.

However, even with all those developments, the Convention and the objectives it pursues remain unchanged, and we should not let the IWC drift away from it.

Japan’s proposal is an attempt to restore the function of the IWC, on the basis of the results of the discussions in the “Way Forward of the IWC” process. The proposal argues for the IWC that embodies the objectives of the Convention. The proposal is mindful of the interests of all the Contracting Governments with different views, and gives maximum respect to the diversity of the IWC membership. It is different from the past attempts which failed in the end; they were aimed at reaching a single “compromise” between the Contracting Governments with fundamentally different views. This proposal aims to provide a way for the Contracting Government to “co-exist” within the IWC, with due respect to the different views of the Contracting Governments.

We have made various proposals at the past Commission meetings, but the proposal this year is a manifestation of our unprecedented determination to promote IWC reform, in order to pursue “co-existence” of the Contracting Governments within the IWC. This is a big proposal, and a big question being asked here is, “Are we willing to respect each other and co-exist within the IWC?”

Before closing, Japan would like to express its appreciation to the Contracting Governments that have made their contributions to the “Way Forward of the IWC” process, and is pleased to note that Japan is not alone in this endeavor. In the course of the process thus far, we have received many encouraging comments in support of our cause. The importance of upholding the principle of sustainable use of whale resources based on science and the need to restore the functions of the IWC are echoed by other Contracting Governments.

We have had enough failures, and cannot continue making the same mistakes. We look forward to a constructive discussion in the spirit of cooperation and mutual respect as well as to the sincere participation of the distinguished members of the delegations in the discussion. We heartily hope that, this Commission meeting will be a turning point of the IWC for the good of all Contracting Governments.