



## YoD Newsletter June 2008

### The IWC Annual Meeting & New YoD Ambassadors

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What is the International Whaling Commission?

The IWC was set up by the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW) in 1946 to promote and maintain whale fishery stocks, as well as maintain prices for whale-derived products. Since the 1980s the IWC has become the primary mechanism for the protection of all species of whale. The change in the IWC's institutional mission began in the early 1970s. The result of this shift is most evident in the IWC's adoption of a five-year moratorium on commercial whaling, which commenced in 1986 and has been extended to the present, and in the IWC's recent designation of the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary.



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The role of the Commission is to periodically review and revise the Schedule to the Convention, controlling the conduct of whaling by setting the protection of certain species; designating areas as whale sanctuaries; setting limits on the numbers and size of catches; prescribing open and closed seasons and areas for whaling; methods and intensity of whaling, types of gear to be used, methods of measurement and maximum catch returns. Under its constitutive document, the IWC is given the task of adopting regulations "to provide for the conservation, development, and optimum utilization of the whale resources" with the condition that such regulations "shall be based on scientific findings."

The protective role the IWC has taken has come under strain since the late 1980s, as various species of Minke Whale were argued to be sufficiently populous to allow commercial hunting. The sharp controversy between those who wish to resume commercial whaling and those who have for the most part successfully opposed it has, as one consequence, led the pro-whaling nations to question the IWC's decisions.

Traditionally, the IWC meets annually, usually in May or June. Meetings are composed of one voting representative from each state party who may be accompanied by experts and advisors. The meetings are generally extremely divisive — demonstrating a complete split on all major issues between the pro-whaling nations and their supporters and the anti-whaling nations. The IWC's Rules of Procedure allow certain non-parties, NGOs and intergovernmental organisations to attend the meetings and to be represented by observers.

There are currently 81 members to the IWC, with the number of member states having grown by almost 30 since 2000. The headquarters of the IWC is in Cambridge, England. The Commission has three main committees — Scientific, Technical, and Finance and Administration.

60th Annual Meeting of the International Whaling Commission in Chile

The IWC held its 60th annual meeting in Santiago, Chile from 23-27 June.

A success at the meeting was the prioritisation of climate change as a significant threat to whales. A well-received WWF report at the meeting revealed the dangerous extent of the climate warming threat to whales: with crucial feeding zones receding south around Antarctica and their foraging resources (mainly krill) becoming less abundant simultaneously, baleen whales face a crisis which will become even worse as ice cover recedes around Antarctica. Essentially, ice-associated whales will face dramatic changes to their habitat over little more than the lifespan of an individual whale. WWF is recommending the protection of critical habitats and for also limiting other non-climate stresses to whale populations such as fishing, pollution and ocean noise. The IWC will now be holding a special workshop on climate change next year, and several governments have made financial contributions to ensure this initiative is a success.

Another positive development was the achievement of a unilateral consensus position by the Latin American bloc at the meeting – all 12 Latin American member governments of the IWC are now strongly in support of whale conservation.

On the negative side, the old deadlock on commercial whaling between pro-whaling and anti-whaling nations essentially continues unchanged. No progress was also made concerning the so-called 'scientific' whaling.

#### Whales wrongly blamed for fisheries crisis

In response to the global fisheries crisis, characterized by falling abundances of resource species, declining catches, habitat destruction and high subsidies, there have been claims that marine mammals, particularly the great whales, compete with humans for fish resources; that efforts to protect these whales from extinction have led marine ecosystems to be "out of balance;" and that such balance can only be re-established by large-scale culling.

Where good data are available, there is no evidence to support the claim that marine mammal predation presents an ecological issue for fisheries. The research programs that support culling use antiquated field techniques, which tend not to generate data useful for addressing questions on the ecological role of marine mammals.

The appropriate framework for understanding why developing countries experience diminishing supplies of fish is competition from the international market. The rapid development of the world fisheries market, combined with the expansion of the subsidized distant-water fisheries, has resulted in the acceleration of the trend wherein fish caught along the coast of less affluent countries gravitate toward the markets of affluent countries. Blaming the whales for this development diverts scarce resources and media attention away from the real issue.

What is becoming abundantly clear, through efforts of countless fisheries biologists and economists, is that the world's fish stocks are being decimated by subsidized industrial fleets, aided by huge numbers of small scale fishers for whom fishing is often the only possible mean of livelihood. This is the policy challenge that must be addressed.

Suggestions that fisheries problems can be attributed to whales consuming huge quantities of fish distract attention from the root cause of these problems: fisheries mismanagement. The challenge posed by declining fisheries resources cannot be addressed by making whales the scapegoats for this dangerous development.

Portuguese swimmers Miguel Arrobas and Nuno Vicente appointed as Ambassadors for the Year of the Dolphin

Olympic swimmer Miguel Arrobas and Nuno Vicente dedicated their crossing starting from the island of Berlenga Farilhões to Peniche, to the cause of dolphin conservation.

Turbulent sea conditions made the crossing much more difficult and challenging to the swimmers. Defying the waves, Nuno Vicente and Miguel Arrobas arrived after swimming for seven hours in Atlantic waters of only 13 C.

Enthusiastic supporters celebrated the swimmers upon their arrival in the port of Peniche. After having received silver trophies in recognition of their outstanding performance from the Mayor of the town of Peniche, the YoD coordinator presented the official YoD Ambassador certificates to the athletes. Miguel Arrobas said: "We want to spread the message that every one of us needs to make a contribution towards dolphin conservation." Nuno Vicente added: "Dolphin populations are in

decline on a global scale. Therefore we want to raise awareness about dolphins and the threats they face.”

Curious dolphins escorted both swimmers during the crossing. The event was supported by the Municipality of Peniche, which had organized the World Children's Day and World Animal Day in 2007 drawing public attention to the Year of the Dolphin. In the run up to the swim, both participants together with the Peniche Municipality had called upon companies involved in the current 'Festival dos Sabores do Mar' to act as sponsors. Companies were asked to donate 1 € for every kilometre of the total crossing of 24 kilometres. Miguel Arrobas and Nuno Vicente also contacted schools encouraging them to present small projects such as drawings or short stories about the "Dolphins of Peniche". The Portuguese version of the YoD Dolphin Manual was also launched at this event, and several hundred manuals were distributed to children. The Manual is available for download on the YoD site.

The YoD campaign does not only rely on the Parties to the Convention, but also on the personal commitment of outstanding individuals. During their crossing of the English Channel set for 9 August, Nuno Vicente and Miguel Arrobas want to renew their mission for dolphin conservation.

See some Portuguese TV footage of the event: [Report shown on the 20pm news on RTP 1](#)

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