

## **SMALL ISLANDS VOICE**

Adapted from newspaper articles in Caribbean Net News and the Guardian (16 June 2006) and San Juan Star (20 June 2006)

Title: Commercial whaling: sustainable development or an insupportable

Date: Friday, 23 June 2006

Last week, in St. Kitts and Nevis, the International Whaling Commission, led by the pro-whaling countries - Japan, Iceland and Norway - voted (33 in favour, 32 against and one abstention) to adopt a non-binding declaration that supports the pro-whaling agenda and states that the International Whaling Commission will collapse unless whaling resumes. The St. Kitts and Nevis Declaration (which may be read in full at:

<http://www.unesco.org/csi/smis/siv/Forum/SKNdeclaration06.pdf>

notes that the moratorium on whaling was adopted in 1986 without advice from the Commission's Scientific Committee, and that it was intended as a temporary measure. Since then, research has indicated that many stocks and species of whales are abundant and sustainable whaling is possible. Furthermore, scientific research has shown that whales consume huge quantities of fish, making the issue of commercial whaling a matter of food security for coastal nations. Even though the pro-whaling nations will need a 75% majority to formally scrap the moratorium and resume commercial whaling, there is no doubt that this declaration brings in a new era in the conservation of whales.

The list of countries voting in favour of overturning the moratorium makes for interesting reading (see list at the end of this article). Many of them are small African, Caribbean and Pacific nations with minimal whaling interests.

Several international commentators have noted that Japan has spent millions in grant aid for fisheries development in some Caribbean countries, implying that votes are being bought. This allegation is strongly denied by the Japanese who point to their desire to see managed whaling based on scientific knowledge.

However, there are some odd aspects to Japan's position and that of its Caribbean supporters. Firstly, Greenpeace reports: This year all the private companies behind Japan's scientific research whaling pulled out, claiming that there is no profit to be made from whaling and that too few Japanese people are interested in eating whale meat. In response the Fisheries Agency of Japan has set up its own company to try and sell the chopped and boxed by-products of its science to schools, hospitals and restaurants. Why hunt whales if the Japanese people don't want to eat them?

The second oddity comes from the Caribbean nations who supported the declaration. Whales are more profitable to the Caribbean alive than dead. As some say, whales should be seen, not hurt. A stakeholder from the Dominican Republic related how in one location, Samana, whale watching during the 65-day period when the whales pass through, brings in more than US\$ 15 million in direct and indirect revenue annually.

Japanese consumers don't want to eat whales. Caribbean nations make more money from tourists who want to watch whales. So why hunt them?

Even with the moratorium in effect, the International Whaling Commission has permitted some small-scale sustenance whaling, and whaling for scientific research. As Japan points out, its research is carefully designed to study whale populations and the ecological role of the species. And in fairness to Japan, it is not the only nation that wants to see commercial whaling resumed. Norway ignores the present ban on commercial whaling and Iceland also slaughters a lesser number of whales. The USA allows indigenous hunters to take a few for sustenance, although witnesses report whale hunting is done in Alaska by natives, with high-powered, scoped, elaborate weapons.

At the heart of the dispute is a clash on what the International Whaling Commission is all about. Pro-whaling nations refer to the original purpose of the Commission which was to ensure proper and effective conservation and development of whale stocks. But the anti-whaling lobby says there is no place in a modern world for an organization which promotes the killing of whales.

What do you think?

**Countries voting in favour of the St. Kitts and Nevis Declaration**

Antigua and Barbuda, Benin, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Denmark, Dominica, Gabon, Gambia, Grenada, Guinea, Iceland, Japan, Korea, Kiribati, Mali, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mongolia, Morocco, Nauru, Nicaragua, Norway, Palau, Russian Federation, St Kitts & Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Senegal, Solomon Islands, Suriname, Togo, Tuvalu.

**Countries voting against the St. Kitts and Nevis Declaration:**

Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Belize, Brazil, Chile, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, Mexico, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Oman, Panama, Portugal, San Marino, Slovak Republic, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, USA.

**Abstention**

China

**Absent**

Guatemala