

MONACO TAKES MAJOR INITIATIVE BY SETTING INTERNATIONAL TASK FORCE FOR THE PRESERVATION OF HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES OF MARINE CETACEANS ON THE HIGH SEAS

Panama, 6th July 2012: ECCEA -East Caribbean Coalition for Environmental Awareness



Monaco has presented an important conservation initiative to the 64th Annual Meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) that just ended in Panama. The proposal to protect all species of "Highly Migratory Cetaceans in the High Seas" was presented in articulate, crystal-clear fashion by Prof. Frédéric Briand Whaling Commissioner for Monaco. It will be difficult in the future for those present to pretend that the many species of cetaceans (whales and dolphins) that roam the world oceans are efficiently protected, at international level, from massive unregulated catches and/or from the drastic degradation of the marine environment. This proposal, one of the most sensible, most urgent to be presented in years, obviously doesn't suit everyone, and certainly not the three countries still engaged in the controversial practice of whaling despite the IWC moratorium set in place in 1986.

Contrary to certain earlier press statements quoting only Japan and Norway Delegates, the proposal of Monaco received the broad, vocal support of the majority of participating Governments. It also provided Dr Briand with an optimal platform to initiate the launch of a brand-new International Task Force that will work together with the United Nations ongoing initiatives to consolidate both the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the conservation agenda of the IWC.

As Frederic Briand made clear, this proposal touches both on UN and IWC unfinished business, picking up first on the recommendations of Articles 65 and 120 of UNCLOS' which call for the community of nations - and not only the members of the IWC 'hunting club' - special attention to the conservation of marine mammals and secondly on the fact that the 1946 Whaling Convention (ICRW) lists in its Schedule only half (38) of the known cetacean species; the other 38 species (many of them endangered) are 'in limbo', as he said.

While Norway, Iceland, China, Grenada, St. Kitts, Antigua, Palau, and Tanzania, voiced opposition, it was Japan's Alternate Commissioner, Dr Akima Umezawa, Director of the Fishery Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tokyo who was the most determined opponent to the proposal. He first questioned the fact that the last revised version had reached his Delegation 12 minutes past 6 p.m. - the official deadline on

the previous evening (due solely to a technical problem of the Secretariat's printer) - but Dr Briand agreed with good humour to defer the debate to the following day so as to allow his opposition "to fully metabolize the few five or six words added and the line deleted from the previous version"



IWC action in Panama,- Dr Frédéric Briand (right) carefully making his points while the Delegation from Japan (Dr : Akima Umezawa on far left) listens

Most substantially, Dr Umezawa queried the two pillars supporting the Monaco Resolution: the need to call the United Nations General Assembly to the rescue to resolve the IWC's inability to enforce its own decisions — which obviously targeted Japanese industrial whaling, under the guise of science, in the Antarctic Ocean and in the IWC Southern Ocean Sanctuary - and the lack of a global legal framework to protect the 76 highly migratory species of cetaceans. Japan and Norway would prefer to see them treated in fishery regional conventions as 'fish good to be harvested', which brought Dr Briand to immediately reply that "you don't fish whales, but you kill them with grenades, powerful hi-tech harpoons and high-speed vessels." .

As the Resolution debated met with strong support from a broad spectrum of IWC members, - notably Columbia, Panama, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Argentina, Mexico, Chile and Brazil for Latin America Cyprus on behalf of the 17 participating members of the European Union, the USA, India, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa, Frederic Briand chose not to call for a vote that could be perceived as unnecessarily divisive. Building on the positive dynamics and great interest just generated, he called instead for the creation of an international Task Force, composed of interested Whaling Commissioners with broad experience of the various UN processes, to engage a coordinated international effort with optimal IWC-UN synergies with a view to ensure lasting protection to the world cetaceans.

Before leaving Panama, a dozen Whaling Commissioners from "key like-minded countries", dixit Dr Briand, have volunteered to constitute this new Task Force : Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, France, New Zealand, South Africa, the UK and the USA.

Prof. Briand is also Director General of the famed Mediterranean Science Commission (CIESM - www.ciesm.org) an 100-year old organisation of

22 Member States dedicated to federating marine research in the Mediterranean and Black Seas Based in Monaco, it brings together thousands of top class oceanographers and scientists from all Mediterranean shores who together pursue multi-lateral cross-Basin research programs. Frederic Briand who will chair the Task Force is determined to engage its coordinated work without much delay; "count on me, he said, it will not be long - and definitely before year's end - that one will hear about the next step of the Monaco proposal

We wish him luck.

** humpbacks: photo courtesy Laurent Bouveret OMMAG*