



# INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION

## IWC 66 Report: Portorož: Slovenia

### **Day One: Once more**

Ever since the International Whaling Commission moved to biennial meetings, the drama that was played out every year for decades has diminished in intensity, but it is still there. This year's meeting is in Portoroz, Slovenia, the same venue as last time. Everyone liked it so much they decided to come back. Besides, there were no other offers. It's mid October, so the balmy Adriatic isn't quite so inviting, but it is still a comfortable land of palm trees and pizza. Not quite so is the scene inside the Gran Hotel Bernadin, where the delegates sit in rows listening to the to and fro of debate through earphones that offer translation in 4 languages. There are 46 national delegations here, and everyone is looking at the empty Panama chair and counting votes for and against the South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary (SAWS). A vote by Panama for or against could tip the scales one way or the other. A few abstentions could make it a reality. Tomorrow morning, we will know.

The SAWS was first proposed in 2001 by Brazil and Argentina. Establishing it made eminent sense, as it would join two existing sanctuaries, in the Indian Ocean and Southern Oceans, thus ensuring that the entire southern hemisphere was protected. The proposal went down easily, defeated by Japan and its allies. It has come back again and again in the years since, gradually obtaining more support, and depending on who you are talking to, this time it has a good shot at succeeding. The objections of the opponents have been addressed one by one until all that stands in the way is Japan's obstinacy. The proposal has been reviewed by the Scientific Committee and the Conservation Committee, a management plan has been created, and every range state that is a member of the IWC is a co-sponsor. In the debate today, Japan's argument sounded hollow. It was basically a refusal to give up the prospect of killing whales sometime in the future, a dim prospect at best, if not impossible. Still, Japan will not let go of its opposition, and its acolytes won't either.

SAWS is by no means the only big ticket item in this show. Japan is once again on the firing line over its refusal to give up killing whales in the Antarctic. Having declared the International Court of Justice irrelevant and its decision against Japan's Antarctic whaling meaningless, it went its own merry way last year and killed 335 minke whales in the Southern Ocean Sanctuary. Many members of the Commission were outraged by this blatant refusal to act as a decent world citizen. At the last IWC meeting in 2014, a resolution was passed telling Japan

it has to get approval from the Scientific Committee before resuming Antarctic whaling. It did not, and went ahead anyway. The upshot is a new resolution by Australia and New Zealand, telling Japan that it has to have Commission approval first. That's a much higher barrier, one that is unlikely to be breached. At first glance, it seems like a winning approach to the problem, but given the tricky turf the IWC sits on, it may not. The biggest problem I have with the resolution is that it will give Japan 3 more years of essentially open season in the Antarctic – 2 years before the Commission meets again, and another to act on any decision it might make at that meeting. Many delegates and observers at this meeting think Japan will just go ahead regardless. An alternate view is that the next Antarctic whaling season will be Japan's last, because Sea Shepherd's new vessel will be able to outrun the Japanese fleet. Tomorrow, we will know that results of the resolution, which will give us a clue about the outcome of this meeting.

There is already one very positive development. NGOs are being given a greater voice, not quite being able to participate in debates as they please, but allowed to speak to agenda items after delegates have spoken, and without preapproval. The IWC is not yet where other international bodies like CITES have been for ages, but it is getting closer to meaningful civil society participation. That is good news for whales, and good news for those of us who have become accustomed to scurrying around in dark shadows.

By Paul Spong,  
Portoroz, Slovenia  
October 24, 2016

## **IWC Day Two: A blast from the past and a rude awakening**

Sidney Holt has saved more whales than anyone. It's a bland but totally true statement. Were it not for Sidney, the blue whale would probably be gone from the face of the Earth. Extinct. Fin and humpback whales would not be far behind. Hundreds of thousands of deaths, possibly millions.

The IWC was formed in 1946. The assessment rule of thumb of the day was the "blue whale unit" and quotas were set accordingly. A blue whale unit equaled one blue whale, 2 fin whales, two and a half humpback whales and six sei whales. It was all about oil. The more whales killed, the more oil produced. The whalers went on their merry way until profits started going down. Less oil was being produced year by year. Worrisome. The Commission didn't trust the advice coming from its scientific committee, so it decided to call in an independent group of scientists, who formed "The Committee of Three". Sidney was one of them, the others being Doug Chapman of the USA and Kay Allen of Australia. Their conclusions in the early 1960s rocked the IWC and put the brakes on commercial whaling. Sidney, who worked for the FAO as a fisheries biologist, did the math that showed how dire the situation was. We and the whales owe a huge debt of gratitude to him. He is now 90 years old and a little frail,

but his mind is as sharp as a razor. And he is here, regaling anyone within earshot with tales from the past that bring hoots of laughter and moments of reflection. A few lucky among us have a hot off the press copy of his book: SAVE THE WHALE! Memoirs of a whale hugger. It's hard to know what the delegates at this meeting make of Sidney's presence, but he is very visible and I suspect some of them recognise him as the enemy who won. The moratorium on commercial whaling, the Indian Ocean Sanctuary, and the Southern Oceans Sanctuary would almost certainly not exist without Sidney. We are blessed by his presence as we try to turn the page.

Reflections aside, this has been a very difficult day. It began with yet another rejection of SAWS, the proposal to establish a sanctuary for whales in the South Atlantic Ocean. The vote in favour was about 60%, so it didn't come close to achieving the ¾ majority it needed. Hopes dashed, the proponents led by Brazil and Argentina press on. Brazil has offered to host the next IWC meeting, in 2018, so perhaps the ambience of that land of beaches and beauty will be enough to put Japan's acolytes under their spell. We can only hope. Hope aside, the spectacle of country after another casting votes according to Japan's script was enough to turn strong stomachs.

The next blow came when a resolution about trying to save the vaquita from extinction stalled under the stony (read heartless) gaze of Iceland and Norway. Mexico's tiny dolphin is being drowned in gill nets being set to catch totoaba, a fish in the northern Gulf of California that is being caught for its swim bladder, which fetches big bucks in China and Hong Kong. The totoaba is itself endangered, and the trade is illegal, but none of that matters. A year ago, the Vaquita was down to less than 100 individuals; now, with three recent deaths, it is just 59. The situation cries out for urgent action. Mexico is trying. CITES and the IUCN have taken up the Vaquita's cause at their recent meetings, so it seemed a no brainer that the IWC would too. Not so. Instead of passion and action, what we got was mean spirited whining. I tell you, if Iceland and Norway persist in claiming that the IWC has no business dealing with small cetaceans because they weren't mentioned in the 1946 Convention, I might just throw up more than breakfast. What on Earth are these guys playing at? What do they not understand about the word extinction? Do they not remember the baiji?

Onward, we entered another dark tunnel, aboriginal subsistence whaling. I doubt whether anyone in the room objects to the principle that aboriginal people in the Arctic, who have depended on cetaceans for centuries should be deprived of an important source of food. But what we heard was a claim of rights that amounted to open season, and a report from an "expert panel" that offered a blank cheque as a solution. No need any more for a "needs statement. Just fill in the blank with a number, any number, and go right ahead. I may be exaggerating, because the IWC will still have to approve quotas, but that's what it sounded like. Some words of caution were heard, and we shall see before this week ends how the wind is actually blowing, but it feels a bit in the face at the moment.

By Paul Spong,

Portoroz Slovenia,  
October 25, 2016

## **IWC 66 Day Three: Going going**

The morning of this day was all about numbers. Some sounded pretty good, like the recovery of southern hemisphere humpback whales to 70% of their “carrying capacity”. I’m not sure whether “carrying capacity” refers to the original population size before the wanton slaughter began, or to the ability of the diminished ecosystem of today to sustain the number of humpbacks that are now alive. Anyway, it sounded like pretty good news for a species that had been brought down to a point where it was teetering on the brink of extinction. There were other encouraging examples too, proof of the amazing things that can happen when killing stops and life begins again. It’s hard to believe, but blue whales in the northern hemisphere are mighty once again. Things are not quite so good in the southern hemisphere, where blues took the brunt of the hit from industrial whaling, but they are recovering too. It was all good news for species after species, though there were exceptions. The South Atlantic right whale is in trouble, despite signs a few years ago that it was recovering. Too many babies are washing up on beaches, for reasons unclear. Overall though, one might think of celebrating the recovery that has taken place since the moratorium was enacted 30 years ago, and enjoy a round of high fives or a glass of bubbly. Except for the language used. Whales are not populations and communities of sentient beings for this august body; they are stocks, like cans lined up on a supermarket shelf, waiting to be plucked by eager hands. Those eager hands are the worry here. There are many of them, and there is no sign of them going away. Given what we are learning about whales and their cultures, that is so, so sad.

It turned out that culture provoked the biggest fight of the day. No fisticuffs were thrown, but they may well have. The strident voice of the pro whaling Japanese NGO who defended Japan’s bid for a coastal whaling quota was so loud that it probably caused ears to be covered. I doubt if he advanced his cause, especially because he impulsively took the microphone out of the hands of the pro whale Japanese NGO when she started to speak in a soft reasonable voice. I’d say he lost that argument ten to zip. Japan’s case boils down to history. Hundreds of years ago, people from small Japanese villages went to sea in little boats to catch big whales. This created the grounds for today’s argument that coastal whaling is a cultural Japanese tradition. The counter argument from many delegates today is that it would be a commercial hunt and therefore a violation of the moratorium. Just the same, Monaco ventured the thought that if Japan were to give up “special permit” whaling and cease its assault on the Antarctic sanctuary, there might be a possibility that its coastal whaling could be classified as aboriginal and exempted from the moratorium. Japan wasn’t biting. Instead, it launched another strategy, raising the issue of the future of the IWC, recognising the divide that exists and seeking compromise in dulcet tones that sounded so reasonable that one might be lulled into believing in a change of heart. Until the wall. South Africa went along with

Japan for a while, apparently believing, and raised the possibility that small cetaceans could at last be included in the Commission's mandate. Not a chance.

Small cetaceans turned out to provide the agony of this day. The Scientific Committee has done a lot of work looking at populations of small cetaceans and identifying some of them as in dire trouble. Mexico's Vaquita is one, another is New Zealand's Maui dolphin. The Scientific Committee resorted to unusually emphatic language in its report on these endangered species, calling on the Commission to act urgently, or face the extinction of yet another species. Tomorrow we shall hear the decision about the Vaquita; late afternoon signs today suggested there might be enough language in the emergency resolution tabled by the USA to encourage immediate and urgent action. We shall see, and there is some hope, but when it came to the Maui dolphin we will not see anything like the action that is so desperately needed. This tiny New Zealand dolphin is facing threats from seismic exploration as well as gill netting and is certainly as endangered as the Vaquita. All we heard from New Zealand were the same lines as two years ago. They are monitoring the situation. The word pathetic comes to mind. Why on Earth the plea of the Scientific Committee wasn't heard and real action taken to save the 53 Maui dolphins left alive today is anyone's guess, but as a New Zealander, I hang my head.

So we come to the worst news of today. Irawaddy dolphins, who inhabit the trans boundary area between Laos and Cambodia, are functionally extinct. That means there are too few of them to breed and give the population any chance of recovering. Their numbers are down from just 6 individuals early this year to 3 now. Too sad for words. It's time to beat the drum!

by Paul Spong,  
Portoroz Slovenia,  
October 26, 2016

## **IWC 66 Day Four: Back down the rabbit hole**

This is all very familiar, and so so strange. The last time the International Whaling Commission met, the plenary proceedings took 4 days. Afterwards, the Secretariat sent around a survey asking for suggestions about how to make things better. A common response was to add a day, so that is what we have this time, a five day meeting. I'm by no means convinced the extra day contributes anything useful, because what we have is one repetition after another of lines written from a script we're all familiar with. Antigua and Barbuda's Daven Joseph drones on, making pious statements about the rights of people that used to be somewhat entertaining because of the cadence of his voice but are now just annoying. No one believes him, yet he gets to spout his nonsense time and again. The Chair is doing his best to control the meeting, but it really is out of control. Japan is not quite getting its way, but it is getting enough to make it happy with the way things are going.

Much of the first three days were taken up with tricky items that were left hanging, including all of the resolutions that were tabled at the beginning. So this was a cleanup day. The meeting opened with the trickiest item of all, "whaling under scientific permit" which is code for Japan breaking all the rules that govern good behaviour, including thumbing its nose at the International Court of Justice. The Scientific Committee was given the task of providing the Commission with advice about Japan's so-called science, which comes down to determining the legitimacy of Japan's defiance of the moratorium. It's an unfair question, more politics than science. Does Japan's slaughter of whales in the Antarctic and North Pacific contribute anything useful to our understanding of whales? The answer is no, not much or maybe, and given the makeup of the Committee, not unexpected. The Scientific Committee is as divided as the Commission when it comes to opinions about whales and whether or not they should come under the gun. But still, it has a job to do, and when told by the Commission, tries. It has tried several times internally, and brought in outside experts to assist, but has failed to come up with a clear answer. So we come down to today and the resolution by Australia and New Zealand which attempts to bring "scientific whaling" under Commission control. The vote was predictable. Japan lost. This might sound like a victory for whales but it really wasn't. It will be two more years before the Commission acts on the resolution, if indeed it does, two more years of slaughter in a sanctuary. What does Japan not understand about the word?

Though there were no real surprises, there was a moment of levity when Iceland voted Yes then quickly No! A ripple of chuckles went around the room, including from Iceland. The vote, 34 yes 17 no 10 abstentions was interesting mostly for some of the abstentions. Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Grenada, Kenya, Mauritania and Morocco have all been Japanese puppets at this meeting, yet they failed to support Japan on one of its principle stands. Had the outcome been less certain, they would have voted otherwise, but this was food for thought and possibly a hint of cracks in the wall.

Voting on the other resolutions was just a predicable. Japan lost and it would be tempting to say whales won, but they really didn't. Resolutions have no real weight, for the most part they are just expressions of opinion. The only real teeth in any of the ones voted on here was the resolution on special permit whaling, which has set in motion a process which may bear fruit at the next meeting, but as I've said it is at least 2 years away and a thousand minke whales could die in agony in the meantime.

And then there was Safety at Sea. This agenda item is tabled by Japan at every meeting and purports to show how innocent Japanese whale researchers are intimidated and assaulted by vicious vegan Sea Shepherders in the Antarctic seas. Some of the images are dramatic enough to bring home the seriousness of the conflict, but I suspect many in the room are glad someone is standing up for whales. Japan wants the Netherlands to strip Sea Shepherd's vessels of its flags, and Australia to deny them entry, but both insist it isn't the job of the IWC to control the behaviour of ships at sea, but rather the International Maritime Organization. We will see what develops between now and the next IWC meeting. Meanwhile, Sea Shepherd

has just launched a new vessel that looked immense in the photograph displayed on the screen by Japan, and is said to be faster than any of Japan's vessels. It could just tip the scales, for once in favour of whales.

By Paul Spong,  
Portoroz Slovenia,  
October 27 2016

## **IWC 66 Day Five: The sands of time**



Day Five of this meeting was devoted to Finance and Administration, a normally pedestrian subject, but one that produced unexpected drama. The resolution on providing assistance to countries with limited means came back to the floor in a form that didn't please a large number of delegations, who thought it needed more work in the intercessional period before the next

meeting in 2018. It did please Japan, which drafted the resolution and sees itself as the potential beneficiary. Japan has spent considerable time and money bringing countries in to support its view of whales, and the strategy has clearly paid off. The Commission is deadlocked over the issue of what whales represent. The current balance favours living whales. The moratorium on commercial whaling cannot be overturned without a  $\frac{3}{4}$  vote, which is unlikely unless more countries come into the Commission to support Japan. Cynically, Japan has been very successful in convincing small and impoverished countries to join the Commission and support its view, but it falls far short of the  $\frac{3}{4}$  majority it needs. This resolution is Japan's big push. It came close to failing. The vote was 30 in favour with 31 abstentions and 1 non-participation. No votes were cast against the resolution. Had the abstentions been no votes, which they really were, Japan would have lost. It's not as if there is opposition to the concept of assisting countries that are genuinely in need, it's Japan's manipulation that is offensive. The task of the pro whale side is now to bring whales the long-term security they need. That means bringing more countries into the Commission to fight for whales, and will involve real work over the next two years. Fortunately, far more people and countries love whales than those who want to see them carved up. So we shall see.

The problem I have with all of this is that the next two years will be occupied by efforts on both sides to shore up their positions. Time and money will be spent, needlessly. As important as it may be, whaling is a distraction from the fundamental issues of today. I asked Japan's

Commissioner Joji Morishita, who is now IWC Chair what he thinks is the greatest problem the world faces. He said population. I then asked him what is the second greatest problem. He said climate. I agree on both, though I reverse the order. Later, I asked him where whaling stands in his list of world issues. His answer was complicated, but it is way down for him, as it is for me. Climate is the only issue we can and need to deal with collectively. Our world and life upon it cannot afford to wait two more years.

We are out of time.

by Paul Spong,  
Trieste Italy,  
October 29 2016

## IWC 66 Slovenia Postscript, Beating the drum

Sidney Holt's book Save the Whale! Memoirs of a whale hugger may not yet be a best seller (it will be) but it encourages me to believe that we (the whales) will win. Win what? The privilege of spending the next generation, hundreds, thousands of years swimming around in a too warm ocean, deprived of sustenance, lonely for life? In my darker moments that just about sums up how I feel about the outcome of IWC66 and what lies ahead. I can't say this out loud, of course, it would depress others as well as myself. We must press on.



The most encouraging thing about this meeting was the presence of the demonstrators. There were two of them. Howie and Arno. They started at the front of the hotel, hanging their banners on the barricades that had been erected to keep demonstrators at bay. Everyone who arrived had to pass by them, so they were noticed. When their numbers swelled to three (Bernhard) they set up another operation at the back of the hotel, the lower level where people went out to lunch or take a walk. When that happened, hotel security locked the back entrance door. Security was very tight at this meeting, with the hotel lobby being constantly



patrolled and access to the meeting requiring scanning an ID badge that displayed a photo. The only time it was breached was when Sidney Holt went out to visit the demonstrators. Sidney is pretty mobile for a 90 year old but he uses two sticks to walk and appreciates the occasional arm to hold on to. After his visit, Howie Cook, the eternal IWC demonstrator offered his arm to Sidney and they walked back to the hotel entrance together. They were stopped by security, and surrounded. After a protest by Howie about the cruelty of not letting an old man in with a little help they were admitted, and walked together across the lobby. Unnoticed at first by security because the evidence was on his back, Howie was wearing a Sea Shepherd t-shirt! It was the only time Sea Shepherd breached the meeting, though their presence was felt, both in the Safety at Sea session and in one of the demo banners. One day there was even a sailboat stationed offshore that had hoisted a Sea Shepherd sail. I'm not sure what



happened to it, as it was only there on that one day. Probably chased or towed away. Out of sight out of mind. Ha. In the old and not so old days, when there were dozens, sometimes hundreds of demonstrators, even a giant inflatable whale, the scene was bigger, louder, rowdier, cars honking, voices raised, a battle joined. Where has all that passion gone? Truth be told, the whales have yet to be saved.

I'm on my way home, on board a Lufthansa plane in Trieste, headed for Munich then Toronto Vancouver and Alert Bay. I am pissed off (excuse the language) mad about the outcome of this meeting, mad at the neglect, mad at the lost opportunity, mad at the waste of time, mad at the fake camaraderie. The whales lost at every turn at this meeting, not exactly wholesale slaughter, more like death by small cuts.

Small cetaceans were the biggest losers. I know the Irawaddy dolphin will be gone before we blink; I doubt the Maui dolphin will be there to save next time we meet; and I doubt the Vaquita will still exist, despite the desperate measures finally agreed to at IWC66. I say agreed to but that wasn't really so. When the emergency Vaquita resolution finally came to the floor on Friday, the last of this grim affair, Japan read out a long list of countries besides itself that were so, so sympathetic to the Vaquita plight that they could not oppose the resolution, but still would not participate in a collective effort to save this beauty \*. Hanging the Vaquita out to dry,



dropping it off a high cliff with no parachute are images that come to mind. What on Earth do Joji Morishita and his cronies not understand about the word extinction? I suppose I should use Japan not Morishita and it, not him, but truth be told, he personifies the enemy. Politeness yes, but not more. I'm thinking that it might be better to have Morishita as the Chair at the next meeting because his stiletto like mind will not immediately be available to Japan on the floor, and in his role as Chair he will have to be fair, or at least appear to be fair.



The Chair this time, Switzerland's Bruno Mainini also attempted to be fair, and except for one glaring exception for the most part accomplished that. The exception came at the end of Day Four. Bruno had been instrumental in giving NGOs a voice, unheard of before him at the IWC though common in other international fora such as CITES (The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species). This time, he allowed NGOs to speak freely, time permitting, until almost the end of Day Four. The topic was IWC communications with other international organisations. Whale and Dolphin Conservation's Carolina Cassini started to read a prepared statement on behalf of numerous NGOs about Japan's violation of the CITES prohibition of trade in whale products, referring to sales of whale meat and other whale bits by a Japanese on line retailer. You can have your order for pretty much anything that comes from whales killed for research shipped to you anywhere in the world and paid for in Yen, US dollars, pounds or Euros. Probably any currency will do. Caro's statement produced consternation among Japan's delegation, many of whom were clearly agitated, and Bruno cut her off, telling

her to keep her comments short. Caro started again, but didn't get far before Bruno cut her off again. She had about 2 lines to go, but that was it. Over. It was hard to know whether Bruno had responded to a non verbal Japanese complaint, but everyone noticed what he had done. Given his tolerance of a previous very long intervention by an IGO (intergovernmental organisation) on the topic, Bruno's action was patently unfair. Later, he apologised. The irony of the incident was that WDC's story about Japan cheating on CITES rules got noticed, a big accomplishment in this somnolent room.



For decades, Norway has gotten clean away with killing more whales than anyone else. It has done so again, by keeping its head down and barely saying a word except No or Yes according to Japan's script. Why is not a puzzle. It's because Norway is rich and can thumb its nose at the world. It is a European country but refuses to join the European Union. Norway first got rich off whale oil. That was way before North Sea oil came along, making it even richer. Today,

giant blue whale jawbones stand as sentinels at the entrance to Sandefjord's richest estates (Sandefjord being Norway's whaling capital). Mute testaments to the past. No words need be said. And that's what we've got from Norway at this meeting. No words. None needed. Just business as usual.



Why is there no outrage? Not just about Norway. There's a long list, for me starting with the Maui dolphin. I think it must be because I'm a New Zealander and still hold great affection for my homeland, but New Zealand's treatment of the Maui dolphin is in a word, disgraceful. I realise that New Zealand's IWC Commissioner is a first timer in this forum, but she is reading from the same script we heard

last time, and the time before that. We are monitoring the situation. Deathspeak. Just 53 Maui dolphins are left alive, proof that the monitoring is precise. Outrageous. Fists should be raised, voices hurled, but nothing by way of protest is heard in the room: Just a polite, thank you New Zealand. I am speechless. New Zealand, so good on so many issues that affect the welfare of whales is here blatantly hypocritical about the fate of this critically endangered dolphin in its own waters. The Maui dolphin only occupies a small ocean space. Why are gill nets not completely banned? Why are seismic air guns not silenced?



It's not as if whales do not have great allies and defenders here. They do. Chief among them besides Monaco are the Latin American countries, members of the "BAG" group, BA for Buenos Aires where Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, Peru, Columbia, Panama, Costa Rica and Mexico came together to form a bloc that is the most vocal and persistent ally of whales in this room. They are impressive, well prepared and will not concede, not even about a violation of the rules on aboriginal whaling by Greenland most IWC members want to sweep under the rug. In 2013 and 2014 Greenland hunters killed whales without an IWC quota. Under IWC rules this was an infraction, but Denmark, which represents Greenland at the IWC refuses to acknowledge it. The problem came about because a Greenland quota was not agreed at the 2012 IWC meeting in Panama, and Greenland went ahead anyway. I doubt whether anyone disputed the need for Greenland's aboriginal people to hunt for food, but what happened was still an infraction. All it would have taken to settle the issue was Denmark (Greenland) acknowledging and apologising, possibly with a promise not to do it again. That did not happen, so the issue drags on.



Time and again, Brazil and Argentina supported by their BA compatriots have introduced a proposal to make the South Atlantic Ocean a sanctuary. Time and again they have been denied. Yet they press on, meeting every defeat with new determination. Next time, in 2018 they will be on their own turf, so they will have home court advantage. We will see whether that will be enough to push them over the  $\frac{3}{4}$  majority line, but I have a feeling the tide will change, and South Atlantic

whales will be protected at last. Besides, I am quite sure that more than 3 demonstrators for whales will show up next time, and that will help.

As the meeting drew to a close on Friday, Luxembourg's Commissioner Pierre Gallego brought a light moment to the room, announcing a tie competition. Photos of 13 ties worn by male delegates were displayed on the screen. Only ladies were allowed to vote. At one point in the voting, Russia was cited for cheating, bringing laughter. The result was close, but Japan's assistant Commissioner won with his Moby Dick tie. Symbolic.



Where do we go from here? Fortunately, there is a way forward. An Ethical Ban on commercial whaling. The idea comes from Paul Gouin, one of the architects of the moratorium on commercial whaling that was agreed by the IWC in 1982. Paul disappeared from the IWC

scene for decades after this victory for whales, but like me has resurfaced. His point is a great one. We now know so much about whales – their brains, their sentience, their societies and cultures – that it is virtually a no brainer that we should not be killing them. So let's stop. Period.



Over the next years, we'll see where this idea leads. It will take just two countries to propose an Ethical Ban on commercial whaling and put it on the agenda for the 2018 meeting in Brazil, as a resolution. Aboriginal and subsistence whaling will be exempted, but the proposal will be that all commercial whaling is banned, permanently. It may take a few rounds to accomplish this, but I do believe that day will come. Peace in the oceans, at last.

By Paul Spong,  
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October 31, 2016

\* Antigua & Barbuda, Benin, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Ghana, Grenada, Guinea, Iceland, Japan, Kenya, Kiribati, Laos, Mauritania, Mongolia, Morocco, Nauru, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & The Grenadines, Russian Federation, Suriname, Tanzania, Togo, Tuvalu.