



THE HON PETER GARRETT AM MP

MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, HERITAGE AND THE ARTS

TRANSCRIPT

E&OE TRANSCRIPT

DOORSTOP INTERVIEW

**NATIONAL WHALE DAY, AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM,
DARLING HARBOUR, SYDNEY**

14 JUNE 2008

SUBJECTS: Whaling; whaling envoy; international legal action

JOURNALIST: Minister, you're off to Chile in a few days time. What is going to be the main push there?

GARRETT: The progress report that we have taken up today shows that the arguments that we have been putting up about the continuing threats to whale populations, and also the strong economic benefits of whale conservation, means that we'll have additional strength to our arguments when we go to Chile in a couple of days time.

Critically, this progress report shows that what we have been saying about the arguments for whale conservation is strongly grounded in science, and that is a really important part of our argument. We don't think that scientific whaling is scientific. What we do say is that we need to increase our collaborative research with other countries - non-lethal research on whales - and recognise that whale watching as an economic activity is a sustainable business for us, not only here in Australia but right around the world.

JOURNALIST: Can you give us some stats [inaudible]

GARRETT: Well we're seeing that the world wide figures on whale watching and tourism are about \$1 billion. In Australia, it is a \$300 million a year industry and increasing.

What this progress report shows us is that the numbers of people who are getting involved in whale watching is increasing every year. So there is strong economic sustainability arguments to say that we ought to be watching whales instead of killing them.

JOURNALIST: [inaudible]

GARRETT: We've always said that we would consider the option of legal action in due course. At present we want to focus our efforts on the International Whaling Commission. We are taking the most substantial set of reform proposals into this Commission that any Government has ever brought forward.

Today's snapshot report shows the strength of the arguments that we have been putting up to now and adds additional weight to the arguments that we'll be putting to the Commission and the countries of the Commission when we get there later this month.

JOURNALIST: So is the legal option still on the table? How likely is it you will pursue that?

GARRETT: Look, the legal option remains on the table but in the meantime we want to concentrate and focus our efforts on the whaling commission meeting. We've got a lot of support from like-minded nations for the proposals that we are bringing forward. But it is a tough forum to have a good debate in. It is a forum where the numbers are very evenly balanced. And it is by no means an easy task for us to succeed in getting these proposals forward, even though we know there is a lot of support for them.

JOURNALIST: Who will you target in that forum? What countries.

GARRETT: Well I have been really pleased to see the decision by the Government of Chile to declare a whale sanctuary as a preliminary action before the International Whaling Commission. That is very positive. And we know that the Central American and Latin American states have been supportive. We know that countries in Europe are supportive of our proposals.

Frankly, I have got to say that if we are talking about an argument about science, let's have valid and credible scientific methods as a way of resolving these issues and let us understand that for Australians, our commitment to conserving whales means that we can see that there is an economic benefit as well as the benefits of knowing that these creatures are not killed in these ways.

JOURNALIST: [inaudible]

GARRETT: We'll announce an envoy in due course. For the moment though the focus is clearly on the upcoming International Whaling Commission meeting.

These meetings happen regularly and in the past they have been meetings which have been particularly unsuccessful. I mean in the past, Australia, has lost a vote.

We're really conscious of the need to be resolute in these meetings, to work closely with like minded countries. I will be spending a great deal of time in bilaterals with our Ministers and senior officials. We will be bringing forward the work and the research that we have done as a country which I think is the responsible way for us to approach this debate when we take it into the global arena.

JOURNALIST: Why has it taken so long to appoint this envoy?

GARRETT: Well it is not a case of it taking so long. It is a case of making sure that each of the measures that we have undertaken is done in a deliberative fashion and at a time that is appropriate.

Remember that we said we would surveil and monitor in the Southern Ocean, and we did it. We said that we would have an enhanced diplomatic engagement. We did it. We said that we would make sure that we had enough material to consider for the possibility of taking legal action. We have done that. We said that we would bring forward substantial, clearly delineated and valid proposals for reform of the IWC – we want to modernise the commission – and we have done that. We said we will appoint an envoy in due course. We will do that.

We can say now that there has been more activity by the Rudd Labor Government on the whaling issue in the last six to seven months, than we saw in six or seven years of activity by the former Government. When you look at the fact that the amount of whaling activity and the number of whales that were targeted for killing in the Southern Ocean increased considerably over the period of time of past Government action, we believe that there needs to be a new approach and the report which I have released today, and which we're going to take into the Commission, provides some foundation for that approach.

JOURNALIST: [inaudible] are we talking years off?

GARRETT: Well look, in due course. I think the think the thing to say is that there are a set of complimentary actions and decisions that we want to take in relation to engaging on this issue. And it is a staged process. There is no question about that.

The focus is on the IWC. It is on constructive and intense diplomacy, because that is what will be necessary when we get to Santiago.

JOURNALIST: But are you disappointed that Mr Rudd didn't take a stronger stance in his talks with Japan?

GARRETT: We've been really clear with the Japanese Government, as we have with all nations, of our opposition to commercial whaling.

We have been very clear with Japan and all other countries on our opposition to commercial whaling and we will continue to make that clear in the relevant fora. At the same time, we're actually talking about a whole new approach to looking at whaling at the International Whaling Commission. We're talking about modernising the Commission, bringing it into the 21st century and recognising that the value these whales have for us alive is much greater than the value they have for us as a world community, dead.

JOURNALIST: But that was his chance [inaudible] to Japan's leader.

GARRETT: We have had significant engagement with the Japanese Government. A number of Ministers have been able to reflect the views of the Australian Government over time. We had one of the most significant demarches in terms of the number of countries who signed on. I have communicated directly with relevant Japanese Ministers.

We have a lot to agree with in relationships with Japan, because they are one of our major trading partners and we have a great deal in common. But we recognise that we have a difference on this issue. That has been fully and clearly communicated. Our task now is to take what I think is a positive reform agenda to the IWC and work very closely with like-minded nations to conserve whales instead of killing them.

JOURNALIST: Is it your advice that legal action, at this stage, would not be successful?

GARRETT: What I can say is that we will consider legal options in due course. At the moment, the critical task for us is to have a good, solid, positive engagement at the IWC and that is what we are committed to doing.

JOURNALIST: Is it the case that New Zealand has said it is not worth going that path?

GARRETT: Well again, what I will say is that it is an option for Australia to consider in due course. We will consider it in due course. But for the present purposes and at this point in time, on this fantastic day when Australians right around the country are celebrating these creatures – we want to take a positive conservation agenda to the IWC and work with like-minded nations to that end.

JOURNALIST: Is this going to be an annual event?

GARRETT: Well I hope so and I think it should be.

Thank you