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MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, HERITAGE AND THE ARTS

TRANSCRIPT

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Issues: IWC

MINISTER GARRETT: This 60th meeting of the International Whaling Commission gives us a unique opportunity to actually take a new pathway for the Commission and change the direction that we've seen in the past and chart a new course for the future. Australia is bringing a substantial reform package to this Commission that says not only do we oppose the killing of whales but we want this Commission to actually focus on conserving whales and recognising whales and recognising that we can do a lot of work together as countries to share research without killing whales, to look at better ways of managing to conserve populations and also having a rigorous scientific basis to make decisions that the Commission has in front of it.

So it's an historic opportunity. Australia comes to the Whaling Commission with positive proposals for change, strongly opposed to the continued killing of whales, strongly in favour of a strong conservation agenda for whale populations.

REPORTER: There's all this talk of a compromise. Can I ask what Australia's position might be if an offer was put on the table that Japan abandon its scientific hunt, but is allowed to do small scale coastal whaling. Would Australia consider a compromise that might overturn the hunt?

MINISTER: Australia hasn't come to the Whaling Commission to compromise at all. We are absolutely strongly of the view that we do not want to see the commercial exploitation of whale populations. We are strongly of the view that this Commission needs to concentrate on the science of conservation, not on the science of killing whales, and that is the view we are taking to this meeting this week.

REPORTER: Minister, I admire the optimism but let's talk realistically [inaudible]. Look, with this voting stalemate, at the end of the week none of what you are proposing is going to happen?

MINISTER: Well, we're at the start of the IWC, not at the end and there will be intense negotiations over the next five days. I'm confident that what we've brought through represents the most significant package of measures that any country has introduced to the Commission in the recent past and my expectation, given we've already seen some good strong signals of support from other like-minded nations, is that our measures will be taken seriously.

REPORTER: [inaudible]

MINISTER: Well there is no doubt that discussions and negotiations in the Whaling Commission are always difficult. The votes can be close. Votes have been lost in the past. This is not an easy forum but frankly I don't think we've got any choice if we care enough about this issue to say that we need a new and fresh approach which focuses on the conservation of whales, then this is the place that those measures need to be put on the table.

REPORTER: You're under a bit of pressure here because I see one survey saying 70 per cent of Australians are saying this Government, this new Government, is not doing enough to stop this [inaudible].

MINISTER: Well what I'd say is that this Government has more than delivered on its promises to engage in this issue seriously. We said we'd have surveillance and monitoring in the Southern Oceans. We did that. We said we'd get materials for an option to take legal action. We've done that. We said we'd have significant and serious engagement with the Japanese diplomatically. We've done that. And, we said we'd come to the Whaling Commission with positive proposals for reform and change. We've done that too. And what we've brought forward and what we'll be presenting at the Commission is the *Snapshot* report, which I commissioned, which shows us a couple of things. Firstly, that we still have endangered species of whales. Secondly, that whale watching and the economic value of whales alive rather than dead continues to impress in its capacity for engagement with countries right around the world.

REPORTER: Has the Rudd Government, though, put the issue of international legal action on the backburner?

MINISTER: Well we're taking things a step at a time. This is the right place for us to be bringing positive proposals for change for conservation at this Whaling Commission and the legal option still stands.

REPORTER: What would be your benchmark for success this week?

MINISTER: I want the proposals that Australia has brought forward to be discussed thoroughly. I think that what we're saying is the world has changed and now it's the time for the Whaling Commission to change. What we're also saying is that if we're serious about conserving whales, that the environment that whales inhabit needs looking after and that whales need looking after. Not only do we oppose their killing, but we are in favour of conserving them so that proposals we've brought forward as well as our continued opposition to commercial whaling and of the killing of whales in the name of science, that those measures need to be properly discussed at this Commission and the process for that discussion needs to be continued and agreed.

REPORTER: The anti-whaling bloc has been saying no whaling at any cost for more than 20 years, yet Japan's quota is increasing and Norway's quota is increasing. That's why some in the anti-whaling bloc and some conservation groups think that some sort of compromise is the least worst solution. How come Australia can't come in with that?

MINISTER: Australia comes to this International Whaling Commission with the clearest of views and that is we need to reform an organisation which has not been able to satisfactorily resolve any of these issues in the past. All that's happened is that we've had a sequence of arguments and acrimony and failed process. If we're serious about the Whaling Commission being a body that resolves these issues then it needs to be based in legitimate, grounded and agreed science. It needs to have a process for non-lethal research for whales because that's clearly what a lot of countries want to see happen and it also needs to have a process where we can collaborate with

other countries to conduct research. Whales face a number of threats. It's not only the threat of the harpoon. It's the threat of climate change. It's the threat of continuing ship strikes, it's the threat of changes to habitat. These are the kinds of issues this Whaling Commission needs discussing and Australia's proposals point the Commission in that way.

REPORTER: If the rest of the Commission, particularly the pro-whaling bloc is to go along with any reform proposals, then those proposals surely have to take into account their interests as well [inaudible].

MINISTER: Let us see how the meeting unfolds. I've just got off the plane from Australia. We have a very, very clear and deliberate proposal for consideration by this Commission and I look forward to continuing the discussion over the next five days.

REPORTER: Would you have discussions with Japan as well?

MINISTER: I would expect to have bilateral discussions with a number of countries in the course of this Commission. Thanks very much everybody.

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