



THE HON PETER GARRETT AM MP

MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, HERITAGE AND THE ARTS

TRANSCRIPT

**TRANSCRIPT OF REMARKS TO
THE INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION
REGARDING SPECIAL PERMIT WHALING
SANTIAGO, CHILE
TUESDAY 25 JUNE 2008**

[CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]

Thank you Mr Chairman,

I'd like to thank the Committee for its good work.

I'd also like to associate myself with the remarks of New Zealand.

There can be no doubt that whaling under special permit has been the most contentious and divisive issue facing the Commission.

In the 21st century there is no need to kill whales for scientific purposes. The programs purportedly conducted under Article VIII of the Convention add nothing relevant to our knowledge for the conservation and management of whales that cannot be obtained by non-lethal means or historical records. These data are simply not needed by the Commission.

At present, it is the case that programs under special permit are not subjected to formalised oversight by the Commission given the Commission does not currently review the issuance of permits. This lack of oversight puts populations – such as the J-stock minke whales – at substantial risk of continued depletion.

Whaling purportedly under special permit is also conducted within the Southern Ocean Sanctuary. Australia believes this undermines the substantial benefits of IWC sanctuaries in a serious and unacceptable manner.

After two decades of 'scientific whaling', the proponents of these programs have not succeeded in convincing this Commission or the broad international community that the programs have scientific merit.

In Australia's view, the programs conducted by two countries under special permit are in reality commercial whaling operations prohibited by the moratorium.

Mr Chairman, the Australian Government and people were deeply concerned that JARPA II again took place in the Southern Ocean during the austral summer.

Australia acknowledged the decision by Japan not to proceed to take humpback whales and the fact that no fin whales were taken last season. We have particular concerns for these species due to their conservation status and the importance of humpback whales to the vigorous whale-watching industry in Australia and the South Pacific region.

But we deeply regret that 551 minke whales were taken – without any scientific need and - in our view - primarily for human consumption.

Moreover, Australia's views on whaling under special permit are not tied to any particular species or location since there is no justification for hunting whales for science. There is simply no scientifically defensible level of 'scientific whaling'.

Mr Chairman, it is no longer sufficient for us merely to oppose whaling under scientific permit. It is time for it to stop.

The Australian Government has therefore made two major proposals that are intended to help resolve this critical problem in the Commission. And to resolve it by consensus.

First, we propose the approach to scientific permits in the Commission be reformed. At present, Contracting Governments are required to submit plans to the Scientific Committee for review, but the Commission does not currently play a role in accepting or denying a permit..

This review procedure has been improved by agreement in the Scientific Committee this year that a new review process will be implemented for new, existing and on-going special permit programs. This new process will, importantly, remove the proponents from the review deliberations, and make the process more consistent with acceptable science review practice.

But we need to go further. The Commission should agree by consensus on its research priorities and it should adopt criteria to which all research should conform. The Commission could then assess all permit proposals against strict scientific criteria, and governments would issue permits only with the agreement of the Commission.

This would ensure that all scientific research conducted under the auspices of the Commission carried its endorsement.

Our second proposal is that the Commission should develop regional, non-lethal, whale research plans to coordinate and optimise the research programs of IWC members against agreed priorities and objectives. Australia hopes to initiate such a plan for the Southern Ocean, and that similar partnerships could be established in other parts of the world.

Mr Chairman, the integrity of the Commission's present approach to science is fundamentally compromised by unilateral programs under special permit. This can only ever be a source of division. It must stop.

Australia believes strongly in the need for a rigorous scientific basis to the Commission's work. And this is a principle which is widely shared here, and on which the Commission could build a better future.

I believe there is an opportunity for all members to come together by embracing and expanding a collaborative and consensual approach to science in the Commission. In this way, we can put divisions over 'scientific whaling' behind us, and strengthen the Commission for the future.