



THE HON PETER GARRETT AM MP

MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, HERITAGE AND THE ARTS

TRANSCRIPT

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INTERVIEW WITH KIERAN GILBERT, SKY NEWS
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NEWSREADER: Environment Minister Peter Garret has put forward a proposal at the International Whaling Commission meeting in Chile for an international research program in the Southern Ocean. For more on this joining us now from our Canberra studio is Sky News chief political reporter Kieran Gilbert.

REPORTER: Thank you, Leigh and joining me from Chile, Santiago, Chile at the International Whaling Commission is Mr Garrett. Peter Garrett thanks very much for your time. It's at the end of the day in Chile, you've put forward this proposal to the Whaling Commission for a joint research program in the Southern Ocean. Talk us through what you've put forward and what was the reaction from the member nations at the IWC?

PETER GARRETT: G'day, Kieran. Look today I was able to table and speak to Australia's proposal that we have a new venture of non-lethal whale research which would happen in the southern ocean which would be cooperative and collaborative and which would set a new direction in whale science, and I have to say it was an extremely positive day for Australia at the Whaling Commission. We had very strong support from nations on the floor of the Commission including the United States, the United Kingdom, Brazil, France, Spain, Peru and the host nation Chile. All spoke in support of Australia's approach and warmly welcomed what we brought forward, and there were no dissenting voices on the floor of the Commission which is I think an incredibly positive sign. And frankly a very very clear indication of how serious the kind of issues that we've been raising at this Commission are being taken by other nations.

REPORTER: We spoke earlier in the week and basically the ICC it's been decided that there won't be any binding resolutions, any votes. How has that transpired and how does this give you confidence that you actually have the support among the member nations if there aren't any votes to test it?

PETER GARRETT: Well there still may be votes on the floor of the Commission depending on what issues come up tomorrow, but on some of the very

contentious issues the Commission did resolve to set up a working group which would operate by consensus and that was seen as a way of getting around votes which ultimately didn't bind any of the members. In relation to Australia's proposals for reform what we're seeing is significant support on the floor of the Commission from other member nations and they said very clearly and specifically that they would be willing not only to provide the vocal support but to actually get involved with Australia.

And I think the really important thing about this is that not only did we have support from major nations such as the UK, United States and others, but we saw the South American nations who have a strong interest in whale conservation in the Southern Ocean who are really interested in our ideas about increasing whale watching potential. They clearly said we want to work with you, we want to be a part of the workshops where we can that Australia will be leading.

And a number of nations were particularly positive about the Commission not only having to wrestle with some of the difficult and tough issues that are there but also looking positively. And at the same time I have to say I did again make specific mention of the scientific whaling program of the Japanese, we don't think it's scientific whaling. I did call on Japan in this spirit of cooperation to suspend its scientific whaling program and invite Japan to consider doing research and work in this new venture with other nations which is non-lethal whale research. And it will greatly enhance the approach that we have for conserving whale populations there, and it provides a positive pathway for nations who have a real interest in whale populations and the environment and want to work with us on that important issue.

REPORTER:

Okay so you referred to your criticisms again of the Japanese whaling program. There have been some criticisms levelled at you and the Government for joining this somewhat of a truce, the 24 nation working group that's been established at the ICC to thrash out the more contentious issues. The criticism basically being that it will muzzle your criticism of Japan in terms of its whaling. Will it muzzle you and the Government from actually articulating its views on this issue?

PETER GARRETT:

Absolutely not. We've been particularly clear on the floor of the Commission I've made clear that we want scientific whaling so-called in the Southern Ocean to stop. That was absolutely plain and clear when we spoke yesterday, we've repeated it outside the Commission when we've spoken and represented it to media and to other nations. And today again I've made it additionally clear that we want to see a suspension of the scientific whaling program whilst we know that there's such strong support for our international collaborative research proposals that are there. And I have to say we can do both, we can speak very clearly and strongly in continuing opposition to so-called scientific whaling and we've been absolutely plain about that, but at the same time start to produce some cooperative, positive and constructive proposals which countries are warmly supporting and which provides a way forward for this International Whaling Commission which has been stuck for years and years and years in argument.

REPORTER: So legal action has been put on the back burner then.

PETER GARRETT: Well what we've always said is it remains on the table as an option. For this point in time the proposals and the discussions that we're having here at the International Whaling Commission are the front and centre in terms of us dealing with this issue. This is the place where all the nations of the world who have an interest in whaling gather for these discussions. And Australia has been one of the most prominent voices, both opposing scientific whaling, speaking very clearly about that, but also proposing positive conservation measures, non-lethal measures and collaboration measures with other countries. And I do think that that particular approach that we've taken this time, clear about what we're not agreeing with, but also positive in what we want to see happen is finding great support on the floor of the Commission.

REPORTER: Well if you're pursuing these talks now it seems the perfect time to fulfil that long-promised commitment to appoint a whaling envoy. Will you do that and who is it likely to be?

PETER GARRETT: Well we've always said that we'd appoint an envoy at a time which suited the continuing engagement on the issue, and it was clearly the case that as we headed to the IWC our focus would be on a really strong engagement here in the Commission. I'm leading the delegation and we have our scientists here, we have officials here, and we're working I think productively and effectively both in the Commission and also with other nations. But we will make clear at a time of our choosing who that envoy may or may not be - well who will be, and certainly make that announcement in due course.

REPORTER: And they would handle this new sort of 24 nation working group, Australia's representation within that group?

PETER GARRETT: Oh look, Kieran I think that we can manage that at this point in time both through the existing Government officials who have had that level of involvement and also the work that I'm doing here with the delegation.
Look the critical thing here is that we've said at the beginning of this campaign that it would be a long and a tough engagement. We committed to do a number of things and we're doing each and every one of them in an orderly fashion and in a way which actually maximises our interaction on this issue. And so as a consequence of what's happened here at the Commission meeting in Chile we will have two major proposals for reform on the table. The one that we've been talking about in this interview and one that I'll be tabling tomorrow.
And I will come away from this meeting here in Chile with a clear sense that Australia is providing leadership, is providing clarity in terms of the continuing concern and opposition that we have to so-called scientific whaling, but as well building strong coalitions of like-minded nations who want to collaborate on non-lethal scientific research. And in terms of the continuing engagement on this issue diplomatically with Japan and we have a great deal in common with Japan, the relationship's important but we do have a difference of opinion on this

issue, then an envoy and other engagements by ministers in Japan will be one of the ways in which we'll continue to push this issue forward.

REPORTER: Peter Garrett from Santiago, thanks for your time.

PETER GARRETT: Thanks, Kieran.

REPORTER: Peter Garrett there from the International Whaling Commission in Chile, making the point that he doesn't believe Australia's criticism of Japan will be muzzled by this new truce that's been established during the week of talks to have a working group of some 24 nations to work through the more contentious issues. He's still very critical and he says he'll continue to be.

NEWSREADER: Good thing too. Kieran, thank you.