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MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, HERITAGE AND THE ARTS

TRANSCRIPT

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DOORSTOP, IWC, SANTIAGO, CHILE

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Issues: IWC wrap-up

MINISTER GARRETT: When we came to the IWC, it was at the crossroads and the last two days have seen Australia bring forward substantial reform proposals, which would see this organisation focus on conservation into the 21st Century, our proposals warmly welcomed and supported by a number of countries, and proposals that will now be taken up and taken seriously as the Commission continues its journey into the future.

There were many critics of the IWC and there still will be critics of the IWC. It's by no means an organisation that has easy passage of the issues that it has to look at and discuss but let's be clear, the IWC has not fallen apart this week. As of today, Australia has brought forward two of the most substantial reform proposals for the Commission to consider. They have been taken seriously by member states and they indicate that Australia has provided the opportunity for a future path for the Whaling Commission. That is a significant achievement on the part of Australia and I very much look forward to consideration being given by member states in the lead-up to the 61st meeting and I very much appreciate the welcoming remarks that we received from a number of nations when we brought our proposals on the floor of the plenary both yesterday and today.

REPORTER: You did get a glimpse, didn't you, when the vote was [inaudible]?

MINISTER: I wouldn't in any way say this organisation has resolved all its problems here. It hasn't. But what we've done as a country is provide a template for the future of the IWC. We've identified what we think are some of the significant impediments to reform are. We've proposed ways of dealing with those impediments. We've been very clear in our comments about special permit whaling, and also about so-called 'scientific' whaling. We've maintained strong opposition to the Japanese so-called 'scientific' whaling in the Southern Oceans but we've also played a constructive role in bringing forward concrete, positive reform proposals, which would reform the work of the Commission and see the conservation of whales become a significant priority.

REPORTER: Why haven't you called on the Japanese to suspend the whale hunt this year while the reform process is going forward?

MINISTER: Well, I have actually called on the Japanese to suspend the whaling operations that are contemplated for the Southern Ocean later this year, although we don't yet know what plans the Japanese have. Two days ago I made it clear that Australia opposes and will continue to oppose the killing of whales in the name of science in the Southern Ocean, and yesterday I urged the Japanese to consider suspending their operations for the coming season on the basis that we

had brought forward a positive proposal for collaborative non-lethal research, the better kind of scientific research to understand whales better. We believe we can learn everything we need to know about whales, not by killing them, but by studying them, and we want to study them with other nations, including Japan.

REPORTER: [Inaudible]

MINISTER: Well, I note the comments that have been reported in the media from the Japanese spokesman. That's all that I have seen. If we get an opportunity over the next half day and tomorrow to speak with the delegation, then we'll take that opportunity. What I would say is this: This is only one stage of Australia's concerted action on the issue of so-called 'scientific' whaling on the Southern Ocean. It's been a constructive and strong engagement by us in the Commission. I'm absolutely delighted that we've been able to come into a Commission that has been beset by disagreement, and we've seen some of that, but at the same time, very strongly put forward measures that have been concrete, that have set a future direction for the Commission, to establish a framework that recognises the economic benefits of whale-watching and also that whales are faced with a wide range of threats and we need to collaborate with a wide range of scientists from other countries to best deal with those threats.

REPORTER: Why did Australia decide not to add its voice to the opposition to the Greenland humpback whale [inaudible]?

MINISTER: Well, the vote of the Greenland humpback quota wasn't a vote on whether we should accept Aboriginal subsistence whaling. We've accepted there can be subsistence quotas for aboriginal whaling but because there was disagreement about the science and the delivery of the science and that humpbacks were to be taken this time, we believe that this was not a proposal that should be supported. We think that revised arrangements need to be brought forward for consideration at IWC61.

REPORTER: But for diplomatic reasons you decided not to say that at the meeting?

MINISTER: The Commissioner had every opportunity to raise Australia's views and put them in speaking with the other Commissioners. Many countries wanted to put in a contribution on this issue. We made contributions on a number of other issues and we voted on the matter.

REPORTER: In your templates for an end to whaling, which you put out this week, you've put Australia markedly ahead of other anti-whaling nations. What sort of evidence are you looking for from those other nations to see that it has been picked up. To see that other nations [inaudible]?

MINISTER: I noted the comments that were made on the floor of the plenary and I think it is the first time that, as I understand it, that we have had warm welcoming of a substantial proposal that has been put forward on the floor and no dissenting voices. This says to me that Australia's proposals have been taken very seriously and the debate that we are hearing by other nations on the floor, including their commitment to support the reforms that Australia is suggesting, gives me confidence that we have been taken seriously, but more than that; that we will be joined in this endeavour by other countries and that joining will happen very soon.

REPORTER: Is it going to be a costly exercise going through this template? Does it need to be funded? Do these large programs need to be costly?

MINISTER: Well, they'll certainly require effort on the part of Australia. We will provide that effort, but the key to this is to know that we will be working with other countries and that other countries

have indicated a willingness to work with us. That is a win-win out of our proposals at the IWC. Firstly, that they have been welcomed and taken seriously. Secondly, that they will provide a template for the future work of the Commission because it involves other nations that are already indicating that their willingness to contribute and participate. It's very positive.

REPORTER: Is it a race against time in the IWC, considering the problems that we've seen today?

MINISTER: There's a process in place with the Commissioners' Working Group. We want to look positively at that process. We want to construct an engagement with it that is energetic and vigorous. Of course, we don't want to see any more whales killed in the name of science. We will do all that we are able to do both in the Commission and in our diplomatic engagement to put our views on that, but at the same time the Commission was at the crossroads and its future was in doubt. Australia provided a positive template for a future of the Whaling Commission, one that was supported by many of the nations here and which Australia can be proud of.

REPORTER Japan remains a renegade whaling nation. What's it going to take before Australia takes them to the international court?

MINISTER: That option is on the table but for the moment I can say we had a positive and strong contribution at the International Whaling commission. Australia hasn't come and banged the table and put out a press release, condemning the actions of other nations. We've been very clear in our opposition to so-called 'scientific' whaling, but we've done something positive and constructive as well. We've provided a positive template for the future – a modern organisation that is focussed on the conservation of these magnificent creatures. Thank you

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