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From the Minister for Local Environment, Marine and Animal Welfare
Ben Bradshaw MP



Thank you for your letter of 6 June about whale welfare and the International Whaling Commission (IWC).

Firstly, let me assure you that the UK IWC Commissioner will indeed be demonstrating our commitment to protection and the welfare of whales at the IWC meeting in Korea. At that meeting (IWC 57) the UK delegation will confirm the UK's continued opposition to all forms of whaling other than some limited subsistence whaling. The UK strongly supports the IWC moratorium on commercial whaling, which has been in operation since 1985/86, and our major objective will be to resist any attempt to lift it.

The UK has consistently taken the lead on welfare matters and made clear the importance we attach to improving the methods used to kill whales. This has been a major plank in our IWC platform in recent years, and is an important element in our policy towards whaling. We believe existing methods used to kill whales involve an unacceptable degree of suffering for hunted whales. Like many others, we consider that those countries that insist on whaling have a moral obligation to improve the methods they use to kill whales, to minimise stress and suffering.

This year there will be a sub-committee meeting on Whale Killing Methods and Associated Welfare Issues, and the UK will raise welfare issues during this and at every other appropriate opportunity. We believe that welfare concerns must be recognised by the IWC and that Contracting Governments must commit to improve whale killing methods; we completely reject the claims of many countries that welfare falls outside IWC competence and that compliance with welfare standards would impose an unacceptable burden on the whaling industry.

Building on a Resolution agreed last year, the UK will promote discussion and present information to highlight that current whale killing methods do not guarantee immediate insensibility, and that the criteria used to determine death are inadequate, demonstrating

clearly the cruelty inherent in whaling. In addition, the UK will refer to video evidence of a Norwegian whale kill where the time to death was almost 15 minutes. We will also highlight the inadequacies of the Norwegian 'Blue box' sensors instead of inspectors on some whaling vessels, as we believe that this could have significant management and welfare implications.

As you mention, discussions on the Revised Management Scheme (RMS) are also taking place at the IWC meeting in Korea. A Resolution passed at last year's annual IWC meeting in Sorrento, provided for two intercessional meetings of the RMS Working Group (WG), with the aim of having text ready for consideration and possible adoption at IWC57. As required by the Resolution, the WG meetings have centred on an RMS package proposed by the Commission's Chair. However, the UK considers the proposals to be inadequate, inherently unworkable, and unacceptable.

We are seeking a comprehensive RMS, which would ensure that any commercial whaling which may be authorised by the Commission in future could not pose a threat to whale conservation and that catch limits and other rules would be strictly observed and seen to be so. We will continue to stress that completion of the RMS should be a prerequisite to, and quite separate from, any consideration of the future of the ban on commercial whaling.

With best wishes.



BEN BRADSHAW