

AWI Comments on Resolution on Food Security (IWC/65/10 Rev 2).



Food security is an important issue globally, nationally, and locally. With the exception of aboriginal subsistence whaling, however, the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling which established the International Whaling Commission (IWC) is not – and was never – considered a treaty that included food security as a primary concern. Instead, there are numerous other international conventions, declarations, and agencies that have, as their primary focus, food security and related issues. Such international fora include, inter alia, the Food and Agriculture Organization's Committee on World Food Security, the International Food Security Treaty (proposed),¹ and the Food Assistance Convention² (formerly the Food Aid Convention³).

In addition, there are numerous reports and declarations on the subject, including a report entitled Sustainable Contribution of Fisheries to Food Security⁴ and the Rome Declaration on World Food Security.⁵ Consequently, regardless of the merit of this draft resolution, the IWC is not the proper venue to discuss food security issues particularly when, as is the case in West Africa, food security has little to do with the great whale species that fall under the primary jurisdiction of the IWC.

While AWI acknowledges that food security concerns in West Africa are of concern, these concerns are not linked to cetacean populations. Rather, in the marine environment, the food security issue and the inability to increase sustainable fishing production is a result of: a wide range of unsustainable practices in marine fisheries, including overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing; destructive fishing techniques; the lack of adequate laws and an inability to adequately enforce existing fisheries laws; and corruption.

It has been well documented that marine fish stocks are in crisis. According to the FAO, the share of marine fish stocks that are over-exploited has increased from 10 percent in 1970 to nearly one third in 2009. A further 52 percent of fish stocks are considered fully exploited. According to a 2012 report "Pirate Fishing Exposed – The Fight Against Illegal Fishing in West Africa and the EU" by the Environmental Justice Foundation:

Losses (globally) due to IUU fishing are estimated to be between US\$10 billion and US\$23.5 billion per year, representing between 11 and 26 million tonnes of fish. West African waters are estimated to have the highest levels of IUU fishing in the world as a proportion of the region's total catch, with the illegal catch in the wider Eastern Central Atlantic estimated to be worth between US\$828 million and US\$1.6 billion per year, or 37 percent of seafood catches.⁶

While efforts are ongoing by West African and other nations to crack down on IUU fishing, such illegal operations continue to harm fish stocks, artisanal fishers, and ultimately the people of West Africa who rely on fish products for their nourishment and economic livelihoods. For example, in November 2013, the EU Commission issued formal warnings to Korea, Ghana and Curaçao for their failure to meet their international obligations to fight illegal fishing.⁷ In March 2014, the EU Fisheries Council placed trade restrictions on Belize, Cambodia, and Guinea for failing to cooperate in fighting IUU fishing.⁸

⁶ See <http://ejfoundation.org/sites/default/files/public/Pirate%20Fishing%20Exposed.pdf>

⁷ See http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-1162_en.htm

⁸ See http://ejfoundation.org/news/EUimportban#.U_uHoNh8PZ4
This decision means that EU member states must ban fish imports from these three countries while ensuring that no EU fishing vessels operate in the waters of these nations.

¹ See <http://www.treaty.org//index.html>

² See <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/223824.pdf>

³ See <http://www.foodaidconvention.org/en/index/aboutthefac.aspx>

⁴ See <http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/x6956e/x6956e01.htm>

⁵ See <http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/w3613e/w3613e00.HTM>

Consequently, even if this issue were properly before the IWC, it is difficult to understand how the IWC would even comment on this matter considering that one of the five proponents (the Republic of Guinea) has been subject to trade sanctions as a consequence of its inability or unwillingness to address IUU fishing while another, Ghana, has been warned that its inability to do the same could ultimately result in similar sanctions.

More specifically, AWI is particularly concerned about the claim in the draft resolution that the protection of the natural environment is incompatible with achieving sustainable increases in fisheries production. Not only is such language entirely inconsistent with the scientific evidence, it wrongly suggests that environmental protection and economic growth are mutually exclusive. Instead, the text in the draft resolution seems clearly intended to stimulate additional deliberations over the “whales eat fish” claims within the Commission. Such claims have no practical or scientific merit and should not be given any credence by engaging in any substantive debate over this draft resolution.

Contrary to the resolution’s claim that efforts to ensure sustainable fisheries and environmental protection are incompatible, many International Governmental Organizations recognize that the two issues are intertwined. A recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report noted, for example, that climate trends are an important element of food availability “particularly in the fisheries sector,” as changes in climate are affecting the abundance and distribution of harvested aquatic species around the world. The IPCC report references overfishing as the most serious threat to certain ecosystems such as coral reefs, and noted the Panel’s concern with the cumulative impacts of rising ocean temperatures and over-fishing.⁹

Another example of the recognition that fisheries sustainability and environmental protection are linked can be found in a report prepared for a recent meeting of the United Nations Informal Consultative Process on Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (UNICPOLOS), which noted that, “on the broadest level, fisheries and aquaculture need to be promoted in a way that improves

⁹IPCC. 2014, Volume I: Global and Sectoral Aspects, chapter. 7 on “Food Security and Food Production Systems”. Geneva. The report states that “more than 60% of coral reefs are considered to be under immediate threat of damage from a range of local threats, of which overfishing is the most serious and the percentage under threat rises to approximately 75% when the effects of rising oceans temperatures is added to these local impacts”.

food security and is economically viable, while at the same time conserves marine biodiversity and ecosystems and does not impair the natural ecological processes that support food production systems.”¹⁰

Further, IWC65/10 Rev.2 fails to acknowledge recent scientific research pointing to the fact that rather than competing with fisheries by consuming possibly harvested resources, whales actually enhance ecosystem productivity, thus benefitting fisheries.¹¹

Finally, AWI notes that IWC/65/10 Rev. 2 fails to address a key concern raised by the FAO’s Committee on World Food Security, namely, that food must be safe to eat. As IWC Resolution 2012-1 (on the importance of continued scientific research with regard to the impact of the degradation of the marine environment on the health of cetaceans and related human health effects) notes, contaminants may have a significant negative health effect on consumers of products from marine mammals.

The same UNICPOLOS report referred to above also notes that, “a wide range of concerns have been expressed ... over the unsustainability of the consumption of marine mammals as food, as well as with respect to food safety.” Indeed, as has been well documented in the scientific literature, many cetaceans species carry significant toxin loads which are transmissible to people and can lead to a variety of adverse health effects.

AWI strongly recommends that contracting governments oppose this resolution. Instead, they should encourage the proponents to raise their concerns in more appropriate international fora once they have done everything in their national and regional power to address the primary causes of food security concerns in their marine environment, namely IUU fishing, destructive fishing practices, lack of adequate laws, deficiencies in enforcing existing laws, and corruption.

¹⁰March 2014. Report prepared for the fifteenth meeting of the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea, entitled: “The role of seafood in global food security”.

¹¹ See for example : Lavery, T. J., B. Roudnew, P. Gill, et al. 2010. Iron defecation by sperm whales stimulates carbon export in the Southern Ocean. *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London B* 277:3527–3531. Lavery, T. J., Roudnew, B., Seymour, J., Mitchell, J. G., Smetacek, V. and Nicol, S. (2014), Whales sustain fisheries: Blue whales stimulate primary production in the Southern Ocean. *Marine Mammal Science*, 30: 888–904. doi: 10.1111/mms.12108; Roman, J., and J. J. McCarthy. 2010. The whale pump: Marine mammals enhance primary productivity in a coastal basin. *PLOS ONE* 5:e13255.