

Statement of Chairwoman Madeleine Z. Bordallo
Oversight Hearing on the 61st Annual International
Whaling Commission Meeting
Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife
Wednesday, May 20, 2009

The Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife meets this afternoon to hear testimony regarding the 61st Annual International Whaling Commission Meeting to be held next month in Madeira, Portugal.

The IWC was established in 1946 to conserve whales for future generations and to regulate the then-extensive whaling industry. When whaling quotas failed to protect these stocks, the IWC instituted a moratorium on the commercial killing of whales in 1986.

While the moratorium has had a positive effect on many whale populations, Norway, Iceland, and Japan have for decades called for the lifting of the moratorium and its replacement with a regulated commercial industry.

At the same time, Japan and Iceland continue to invoke Article VIII of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling to conduct commercial whaling under the pretext of scientific research. They continue to do so despite the fact that there is near universal agreement amongst scientists that the lethal take of whales is unnecessary for scientific data collection.

Many of these issues are likely to be debated at this year's IWC meeting, and there will likely be much discussion about the Commission's future. We must be very careful, however, that our efforts to save the institution do not come at the expense of the very species it was intended to protect.

Today, I am joining 34 of my colleagues writing to President Obama to express serious concern about an International Whaling Commission Small Working Group effort – which includes the United States – which would lift the commercial whaling moratorium, give new rights to Japan to kill protected whales, and permit whaling on the high seas to continue.

Although it did not finalize negotiations on its Proposal, the Small Working Group very likely will continue to discuss allowing Japan to engage in commercial whaling called “coastal whaling” off its shores in exchange for a vague promise to cut, or eliminate, the number of whales it takes each year in the Southern Ocean. The Proposal would provide no

guarantee that the number of whales killed would actually decrease, its purported goal.

Instead of negotiating any such proposal, we the signatories of the letter urge the new Administration to issue new instructions to the U.S. Delegation to the IWC to carry out the intent of Congress and the will of the American people to protect and conserve whales.

Specifically, our letter urges the Administration and the U.S. Delegation to preserve the moratorium, stand in strong opposition to existing commercial and scientific whaling, and reject any proposal that would create a new category of commercial whaling such as "coastal whaling."

The U.S. has been and should remain a leader in conserving whale species. With threats to whales increasing -- such as underwater noise, pollution and climate change -- the U.S. should strengthen rather than compromise away protections for these extraordinary animals in an effort to ensure that Japan and other pro-whaling nations continue to participate in the IWC.

With that, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today, and to hearing strong assurances that the United States will hold the line at the meeting in Portugal.