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on Community action in relation to whaling
(2008/2101(INI))

Committee on Fisheries

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on Community action in relation to whaling (2008/2101(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the 1946 International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling and the establishment of the International Whaling Commission (IWC),
 - having regard to the IWC's moratorium on commercial whaling that came into effect in 1986,
 - having regard to the Cetacean update of the 2008 Red List of Threatened Species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature,
 - having regard to Articles 37 and 175 of the EC Treaty,
 - having regard to the Commission Communication of 19 December 2007 on Community action in relation to whaling (COM(2007)0823),
 - having regard to common position 9818/08 adopted by the Council on 3 June 2008 on whaling,
 - having regard to the establishment by the IWC at its 60th annual meeting in Santiago, Chile, in June 2008, of a Small Working Group on the future of the IWC (the "Working Group"),
 - having regard to Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (the Habitats Directive)¹,
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Fisheries and the opinion of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (A6-0000/2008),
- A. whereas the primary objective must be the protection of biodiversity, including the conservation of species,
- B. whereas animal welfare must always be taken into consideration,
- C. whereas there are, nonetheless, issues of food security and supply, particularly for communities that have traditionally engaged in whaling,
- D. whereas the “deliberate disturbance, capture or killing” of all whale species is currently prohibited in Community waters under the Habitats Directive,

¹ OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p.7.

- E. whereas almost one in four cetacean species are currently regarded as under threat, with nine species listed as either endangered or critically endangered,
 - F. whereas the situation of various types of whale has improved since the introduction of the moratorium,
 - G. whereas the moratorium was originally intended to last only until an adequate management scheme was put in place,
 - H. whereas not all members of the IWC subscribe to the moratorium,
 - I. whereas the moratorium does not, in any event, cover the killing of whales for scientific purposes,
 - J. whereas the number of whales killed has actually increased since the introduction of the moratorium,
 - K. whereas a number of NGOs and other bodies have expressed doubts as to whether the scientific study of whales necessitates lethal practices and concerns that the meat derived from them is used for commercial purpose,
 - L. whereas, despite recent improvements, the methods by which whales are killed still fall short of the desired standard,
 - M. whereas cetaceans are endangered not only by hunting but also by climate change, pollution, ship strikes, fishing gear, sonar and other hazards,
 - N. whereas Council common position 9818/08 relied only on Article 175 of the EC Treaty and related only to the above-mentioned meeting of the IWC in Santiago, Chile, in June 2008,
1. Calls on the Council to adopt a new common position under Article 37 as well as Article 175 of the EC Treaty;
 2. Believes that the conservation of whales and other cetaceans depends ultimately on the development of measures that are the subject of universal agreement;
 3. Calls on the Council, the Commission and those Member States participating in the Working Group to work toward the achievement of such an agreement;
 4. Believes that discussions in the Working Group should be the subject of the greatest possible transparency;
 5. Hopes that the Working Group will address the issue of lethal whaling for scientific purposes in order to find a basis for eliminating it;
 6. Respects the need for a limited amount of hunting to be done by those traditionally engaged in it for the purposes of food supply, but calls for much greater emphasis on research into and the employment of humane killing methods;

7. Calls for any such hunting to take place only with clear quotas based on scientific advice, under strict controls and with full recording;
8. Calls also for the establishment, in suitable locations around the world, of more marine reserves in which whales would receive special protection;
9. Calls also for threats to the cetacean population arising from climate change, pollution, ship strikes, fishing gear, sonar and other hazards to be tackled outside such protected areas;
10. Considers that the Commission should, in advance of global action, bring forward further proposals to counter such threats in respect of Community waters and Community vessels;
11. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the International Whaling Commission, the Regional Advisory Councils, the Advisory Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture and the Regional Fisheries Management Organisations to which the EU belongs.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

The International Whaling Commission (IWC) was set up by the 1946 International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling, with whaling regulated under a schedule to the Convention. 20 out of 27 EU member states are members of the Commission.

As a result of concerns about danger to the species, a moratorium on commercial whaling was established in 1982 and came into effect in 1986. This was intended to be pending a Revised Management Procedure to allow catch limits based on scientific data.

The Procedure was agreed in 1994 but the accompanying Revised Management Scheme is still not in place. At its meeting in Santiago, Chile, in June 2008, the IWC set up a working group to move matters forward.

Prior to the meeting in Chile, the Council adopted by qualified majority a common position for the purposes of that meeting. This supported the maintenance of the moratorium, opposed any proposals regarding new types of whaling unless these would “guarantee a significant improvement in the conservation status of whales in the long term and bring all whaling operations by IWC members under IWC control”, also supported proposals aimed at ending ‘scientific whaling’ outside IWC control, for the creation of whale sanctuaries and for the management of aboriginal subsistence whaling, subject to various conditions.

Whaling is an issue on which opinion is considerably polarised. It should be noted that the moratorium applies only to commercial whaling. In addition to the exception for aboriginal whaling, scientific research can be undertaken under special permits which are issued by the country undertaking the research. It should also be noted that not all members of the IWC have subscribed to the moratorium so that commercial whaling still takes place.

A recent review by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature indicates that almost 1 in 4 cetacean species are under threat, with nine species listed as either endangered or critically endangered. Since the introduction of the moratorium there is evidence of improvement in the populations of certain species, particularly larger whales.

At the same time, it appears that the number of whales killed has actually increased since the introduction of the moratorium. There are suggestions, too, that the commercial use of whale meat is a by-product of “scientific whaling”.

Whales are also threatened by ship strikes, fishing gear, climate change, sonar and other hazards such as pollution.

It is important, therefore, that the situation of whales and the issue of whaling is addressed on a comprehensive basis and according to rules to which all members of the IWC can subscribe. If this is not done, whale conservation will continue to be at risk in the both the short and the longer term.

It is hoped that any future Council Decision will take a suitably comprehensive approach and one that shall contribute to the achievement of a consensus.

In addition, although whales are currently protected from “deliberate disturbance, capture or killing” in Community waters under the Habitats Directive, they remain subject to various other hazards. Although work has already been undertaken in relation to fishing gear, it would be helpful if the Commission could come forward with further proposals directed toward the reduction and, where possible, elimination of such hazards.