



CALIFORNIA OCEAN PROTECTION COUNCIL

Lester Snow, Secretary for Natural Resources
John Chiang, State Controller, State Lands Commission Chair
Linda Adams, Secretary for Environmental Protection
Susan Golding, Public Member
Geraldine Knatz, Public Member
Fran Pavley, State Senator
Pedro Nava, State Assemblymember

June 16, 2010

The Honorable Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama,

The California Ocean Protection Council (OPC), a cabinet-level, science-based ocean policy council, has evaluated the "[*Proposed Consensus Decision to Improve the Conservation of Whales*](#)" that will be considered for adoption at the 62nd meeting of the IWC on June 21-25, 2010, in Agadir, Morocco. We believe that the decisions made at this meeting will have significant ramifications for the health and sustainability of whale populations throughout the world, and certainly for species that inhabit the waters off the California coast. Therefore, we are compelled to provide you with three comments that we hope the United States government will consider in your deliberations.

1. The OPC strongly opposes commercial whaling anywhere in the world's oceans and certainly in international waters off the California coast. For that reason, we support maintaining the commercial moratorium on whaling that has been in place for 24 years which is included in your proposed consensus decision statement.
2. The OPC strongly supports the International Whaling Commission (IWC) as the lead regulatory body to manage whale species, and recognizes the IWC's need for serious reforms in order to better conserve these critical populations.
3. The OPC strongly supports measures to empower the IWC to develop a comprehensive and effective monitoring, enforcement, and management plan for protection of whales in the world's oceans. First, the IWC must strengthen enforcement guidelines, and explore ways to ensure that they are adhered to by enforcement bodies. Second, while it is the stated intent of the proposal to improve reporting requirements and DNA testing, it could be persuasively argued that without sufficient resources to create and maintain a robust monitoring program, these attempts would not be meaningful. Presently there is need to develop an actionable plan and secure funding to: 1) improve reporting requirements; 2) create a global DNA database; and 3) create and implement a market monitoring program.

The OPC is encouraged by the IWC's recognition of the non-consumptive value of whales, and encourages stronger language on this point. Recreational activities such as whale watching have become a significant part of our coastal economy. While some whale species have made moderate recovery in terms of populations, others are presently well below historic numbers. Further, whale populations face a number of emerging threats such as climate change, and catastrophic events such as the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. In light of these challenges, we believe a precautionary approach toward the maintenance of whale species is vital to their sustainability.

In conclusion, it is the strong contention of the OPC that commercial whaling in the face of broad scientific uncertainty would do irrevocable harm to vital populations of whale species. We urge the Administration to continue to take a leadership role within the IWC and consider the OPC's recommendations to protect these species now and into the future.

Sincerely,

Lester A. Snow
Chair, California Ocean Protection Council

CC:
The Honorable Gary Locke, Secretary of Commerce

Dr. Jane Lubchenco, Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere
and NOAA Administrator

Monica Medina, Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere
and U.S. Commissioner to the International Whaling Commission