

NEWS RELEASE

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3JR
Out of Hours Tel: 020 7270 8960 Out of Hours Fax: 020 7270
8125

[Up to index](#)

288/04

120 July 2004

INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION FOCUSES ON THE PLIGHT OF CRITICALLY ENDANGERED WESTERN GRAY WHALES ON 1ST DAY OF 56TH ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION MEETING IN SORRENTO, ITALY

A UK resolution to highlight the plight of the critically endangered western gray whale has been accepted by delegates from the 57 member countries represented at the International Whaling Commission [IWC] today.

The UK resolution focused IWC member states' minds on the threat to critically endangered¹ western North Pacific gray whales whose primary feeding grounds are in and around Sakhalin Island.

The resolution called on range states² to bear in mind the existing IWC resolution to pursue practical solutions to reduce human induced mortalities rates for the western gray whale in the region and to minimise disturbances in migratory corridors used by this species.

The western gray whale is considered to be facing an extremely high risk of extinction with only 23 breeding females out of the total population of 100.

UK Fisheries Minister Ben Bradshaw in Sorrento for the IWC meeting said:

"There is always a need to balance the economic needs of man with those of marine biodiversity.

"So far as the western gray whale is concerned, there is alarming evidence from the 2004 IWC Scientific Committee Report that the population is struggling to survive because of biological reproductive difficulties.

In addition, the possible onset of oil and gas development programmes is of particular concern to the survival of this population. All future development, including oil and gas development must take full account of potential impacts on this population."

Mr Bradshaw continued:

"The UK urges all countries, to consider carefully the cumulative impacts that all types of development, including oil and gas developments, might have on this fragile species in and around Sakhalin Island."

The IWC's acceptance of the UK resolution will result in the IWC Secretariat offering independent scientific expertise to these organisations concerned with oil and gas development projects in and around Sakhalin Island.

The Resolution also urges the IWC to participate actively in the whale expert group being convened by potential lenders for those planned development projects.

In addition, the Resolution encourages all range states to conduct scientific research programmes in migration and distribution population assessment of the entire range of this endangered species.

Notes for editors

1 The western gray whale population number no more than 100 and the species was re-classified in the IUCN Red List from "Endangered" to "Critically Endangered". A species is considered "critically endangered" when the best available evidence indicated that is considered to be facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild.

2 Nation states in whose waters where western gray whales exist.