

Tell Japan We'll Keep The Ban - and say it Louder, Stronger and Longer!

With key meetings having now taken place in Anchorage and in the Hague of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species, it is time to reflect on the impact so far on our campaign to save the whales.

When I discovered that the Japanese were planning to kill fifty humpback whales in the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary itself, I simply could not stand back. Amongst my most vivid and fondest memories are of humpback whales in that very ocean. To watch these huge and extraordinary creatures 'breach' - launching themselves head first right out of the water and then crashing back down - is in my view amongst the great wonders of the world.

We all need the whales. They represent the enduring qualities of our planet. Unfortunately, they also represent our own fragility.

And that is why I set out to attempt to persuade our Caribbean friends to back a permanent ban on whaling, because this is one issue where the votes of smaller nations have equal weight with even the largest nations on earth.

The six island nations in the eastern Caribbean, with a combined population of about half a million people, are very important to us. The votes of **Antigua & Barbuda; Dominica; Grenada; Saint Kitts and Nevis; Saint Lucia; Saint Vincent & the Grenadines** at key meetings could help not only to prevent a return to the barbaric practice of whaling, but could play an important part in securing, forever, an end to this dreadful activity.

In 2006, the most important vote at the IWC was in fact won by the anti-whaling nations with a majority of just one vote. The presence of every nation at the meeting was therefore crucial, even though Japan and its supporters would have required a three-quarters majority in order to reverse the current ban on whaling. This year, we saw an even greater rejection of Japanese moves to re-commence whaling.

But, in the same way that the Japanese need a three-quarters majority to reintroduce whaling, we need a three-quarters majority to prevent whaling for good. For this reason, we should not be complacent.

I intend to press on with my campaign. For I am not, as one commentator put it, “pushing at an open door”. Ultimate victory for the campaign could be in sight, but only if we avoid complacency and remain determined to succeed.

From the beginning, I have made no pretence that there is a quick fix to this problem. We need to be realists. This is only the start. The pressures upon Caribbean governments and upon their peoples are numerous. For these reasons, no-one can blame those who have taken financial help from the Japanese, but that assistance should be freely given. Japanese aid often has unacceptable strings attached.

The Caribbean welcomes income from tourism, and tourists come because of the environment. That includes the whales, and the whales themselves represent a much bigger opportunity of sustainable income. In many parts of the world, tourist industries thrive because of whale watching activities. That is not yet the position in the Caribbean, although there are a number of whale watching

operations which should be encouraged. These have the potential to generate substantial overseas earnings.

Conversely, supporting a move to reintroduce commercial hunting could well mean that those same tourists turn their backs on the Caribbean. That would be disastrous for the whales, and disastrous for the Caribbean.

Remember, Tell Japan We'll Keep The Ban - and say it louder, stronger and longer!