



**MINISTÉRIO DO AMBIENTE, DO ORDENAMENTO DO TERRITÓRIO E
DO DESENVOLVIMENTO REGIONAL**
Gabinete do Ministro

61st Annual Meeting of the International Whaling Commission

**Opening Address by the Minister of Environment, Territorial Planning
and Regional Development**

Funchal, Madeira, 22 June 2009

Mister President of the Regional Government of Madeira
Distinguished Chair of the International Whaling Commission,
Dear Ministers and Heads of Delegation
Distinguished Commissioners and Delegates
Authorities, Ladies and Gentlemen

First of all, I would like to express our gratitude, on behalf of the Government of Portugal, for having chosen Madeira for this annual meeting. It was certainly a good choice! Although you must have spent most of your time inside conference rooms, I hope that you still had the chance of enjoying this beautiful island, known as the “Pearl of the Atlantic”, and it certainly deserves this title.

I would also like to express my appreciation for the outstanding support given by the Regional Government of Madeira to the organisation of this 61st Annual Meeting of the International Whaling Commission. Mister President, once again Madeira proves to be an excellent location for this type of events, not only because of the outstanding facilities and the efficiency and professionalism of the staff, but also because the Regional

Government clearly understands what is at stake and mobilizes its best efforts to help creating conditions for a fruitful debate.

This is a meeting of significant importance to our country, since Portugal, due to historical, cultural and geographic reasons, is strongly attracted and committed to ocean issues, and our people, both from the continent and islands, have always been known for their strong maritime tradition.

The fascinating life of whales is certainly an issue to which we place great importance. Portugal has a very successful experience in transforming what was until the mid eighties a traditional whaling activity, deeply rooted in the local culture, into sustainable whale watching operations that contribute to local economies far more than the former whale hunting activities, creating employment for former whale hunters and boatmen.

That happened in this island of Madeira and also in the Azores. Both cases are success stories, proving that whales can be an important economic resource with no lethal practices involved. Portugal is proud for having achieved this transformation, and we are very keen in assisting other countries, especially developing countries, interested in exploiting and developing whale watching opportunities on their own shores. A reflection of this transition in the way we perceive and use whales is, for example, the construction of a large museum dedicated to whales here in Madeira.

Portugal has been a member of the International Whaling Commission since 2002 and our position on the whaling issue is well known. As a country that benefits greatly from whale watching and other non-lethal uses of whales, and as a member of the European Union, we welcome the existence of the worldwide moratorium on commercial whaling. The moratorium has been successful, and several species of whales are experiencing a significant recovery. Our main goal is to find ways by which the current international whale conservation regime can be reinforced.

At the same time, like most other IWC members, we are not satisfied with the fact that the political climate within the IWC is not as constructive as we would wish it to be. Therefore, Portugal is open to discussions about the different possible ways to solve what many call the policy stalemate of the IWC. Portugal is willing to listen, to promote understanding and trust, to reach a compromise.

As we know, a deadlock remains: we have on one side those that strongly believe that whales need stronger protection measures and are marine resources that should only be exploited with non-lethal methods, and on the other those who support that they have the right to exploit whales lethally, as they have done in the past, regardless of any kind of opposition or diplomatic hardship.

These positions are, in both sides, seen as based on virtue and justice, thus not giving room for compromise. But these are moments when

being inflexible does not lead to virtue, but rather to intolerance. The whaling issue can not be solved if we all decide to impose our own views. Therefore, a solution can only be found if both sides are willing to make real concessions and to accept that the final result will not be perfect for any of the sides.

Our hope, and our belief, is indeed that the so-called whaling policy stalemate can be resolved, so that the IWC can move well into the 21st century and address more effectively the contemporary issues affecting whales that have emerged since the IWC was created 60 years ago. Among these issues are the impacts of climate change, by-catch due to entanglement in fishing gears, the effects of increased concentration of marine pollutants, noise pollution from seismic tests, military operations, and ship strikes due to the ever increasing maritime traffic.

Bearing in mind all the issues mentioned above I am strongly convinced that future discussions within the IWC will require an increased involvement of politicians preferably at ministerial level. A political vision is needed to solve this deadlock. Technical and scientific advice are essential but not enough. As we can learn from this process, political leadership should help building trust and consensus.

The times that we are living today are full of major challenges. We are at the middle of an enormous sustainability crisis, as shown by phenomena such as climate change, biodiversity loss, energy challenges and now also the economic and financial crisis. Therefore, to reach our purposes,

we must, more than ever, work in a context of enhanced international cooperation, where increased global governance mechanisms will be needed.

In this sense, marine issues are no exception. So, dear colleagues, this is the reason why our work here is so important.

I am conscious that it will be hard to achieve an agreement that will solve all the remaining issues that affect IWC, but I very much hope that the progress made during this meeting will be an important contribution towards the construction of a fair and balanced agreement to be hopefully reached at IWC/62.

I sincerely hope that the efforts underway, here in Madeira, do represent substantial progress in achieving these goals.

I assure that you can count on Portugal to facilitate and to mediate this process as much as our contribution is considered to be useful.

Thank you all.

Francisco Nunes Correia
Minister for Environment, Spatial Planning
and Regional Development