

IWC Action Alert for Caribbean Countries that are not IWC Members

The 2006 annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC), an international body with about 65 member countries that oversees the management and conservation of whale populations, will be held on St. Kitts this June. As the host country, St. Kitts and Nevis, and the Caribbean region as a whole, will play a pivotal role in the future of marine mammal protection and the fate of the great whales.

In spite of the facts that tourism and whale watching are current or potentials source of significant income for Caribbean countries; there is very little information about the health and distribution or regional whale populations; and that these are shared stocks (meaning the whales we see in Dominica may be the same ones hunted elsewhere in the region or the world), the Caribbean bloc at the IWC votes on the side of the pro-whaling IWC countries of Japan, Iceland, and Norway.

Killing whales jeopardizes ecotourism opportunities for the islands. Whale watching is a large and growing industry worldwide, providing an educational and non-consumptive way for people to profit from whales. It isn't just the tour operators that profit from whale watching. The costal communities also gain income from tourist money spent on restaurants, lodging, and other services. Methods used to kill whales result in animal suffering and bloody water. Tourists who have accidentally witnessed the slaughter of a whale, in whale watching countries such as Iceland and St. Vincent, have been horrified.

The most common argument heard in the region in favor of whaling is that whales compete with fisheries for valuable fish, but this is a fallacy. Historic industrial whaling reduced many whale stocks to near extinction and the number of whales today is a mere fraction of what it was in the mid-19th century. Human overfishing and fisheries mismanagement have reduced fish stocks, not natural predators.

St. Kitts and Nevis has been an IWC member since 1992, though they did not actively participate in the meetings until 1999. The other Caribbean members of the IWC are Antigua and Barbuda (since 1982), Dominica (since 1992), Grenada (since 1993), St. Lucia (since 1981), and St. Vincent and the Grenadines (since 1981).

Please write to your country's Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Tourism today to voice your opposition to commercial whaling!

Ask them to stay abreast of marine conservation issues affecting the region and speak to their regional counterparts regarding obligations under the SPAW Protocol. Encourage them to send an observer or local marine scientist to the IWC meetings. If the Caribbean region continues to vote with Japan and other pro-whaling countries, it could spell disaster for the region's natural resources and tourism industries.