

**OPENING STATEMENT – EASTERN CARIBBEAN COALITION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL  
AWARENESS/ COALITION DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT DE LA CARAIBE DE L'EST (ECCEA)**

**64th Annual Meeting of the International Whaling Commission, Panama City.**

The East Caribbean Coalition for Environmental Awareness thanks the government of Panama for its warm welcome to their beautiful country on the occasion of the 64th meeting of the International Whaling Commission.

The Coalition is now in its 20th year of observership at the IWC and we compliment the Commission on the many conservation initiatives that have been put in place during this time and its determination to maintain the moratorium on commercial whaling at a time when our ocean biodiversity is increasingly at risk in a changing world and where politics and financial gain are priorities for most public decision makers, rather than the preservation of our remaining species.

In this sense we urge the member governments of the organisation to maintain this conservation trend by adoption of IWC/64/8: The South Atlantic Sanctuary for Whales, presented by Brazil, Argentina, South Africa and Uruguay, IWC/64/11: Draft resolution on Highly Migratory Cetaceans and Ocean Governance presented by Monaco, IWC/64/13 and the Draft resolution on the Importance of Continued Scientific Research with regard to the impact of the degradation of the marine environment on the Health of Cetaceans and related Human Health Effects, presented by Germany, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom).

ECCEA also draws the Commissions' attention to other of its concerns :

Marine Mammals and Oil Exploration

Despite the May 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, ECCEA notes with concern that in 2012 there has been expansion of oil exploration and deep sea drilling projects both globally and in the Caribbean which include recent oil exploration agreements between Grenada and Trinidad and Tobago.

Shell's ([RDS.A](#)) [vital oil spill test](#) in June 2012 is the culmination of years of argument with U.S. regulators, leaving Shell [on the brink](#) of drilling in Arctic waters off Alaska in what is expected to be one of the world's most scrutinized campaigns. This expansion also includes recent agreement between France with Royal Dutch Shell on June 27 2012 ([RDS.A](#), [RDS.B](#)) who will [start drilling appraisal wells](#) off the coast of French Guyana after the French government lifted a temporary [suspension](#) on oil and gas exploration in the region. Recent French government cetacean research has provided evidence of a rich marine mammal fauna and local NGO's have called for an independent environmental impact assessment in order to make clear provision for the preservation of whales and dolphins in their waters. Numerous scientific articles confirm the biological effects of underwater detonation, air gun noise which include behavioral disruption in marine mammals, hearing threshold shifts, auditory damage and mortality caused by sound exposure.

Seen the increasing interest in deep sea seismic exploration in the West Indies, which also includes waters off Martinique, independent Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA's) and full consultation is essential, as are protocols to offset marine mammal endangerment and mortality's. These should be an integral part of present or future marine mammal management plans of the IWC's Conservation Committee, the UNEP-SPAW Marine Mammal Action Plan (MMAP), Sanctuaries such as Pelagos in the Ligurian Sea, as well as those created within the EEZs of the Dominican Republic, the French Caribbean and its Marine Mammal Sanctuary "Agoa" and those of many other nations.

### Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling

While ECCEA understands the need for aboriginal subsistence whaling activities in certain conditions and where need is proven, we note that there is a move to develop and use the “Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling” for operations that have commercial purposes, in contravention of the moratorium and other IWC regulations. We urge the Commission to exercise greater vigilance in ensuring compliance on the part of nations permitted to hunt whales under the ASW Regulations. We also suggest the adoption of the Animal Welfare Institute’s Report as a reference point in improving compliance by nations operating under these regulations.

### Whaling in St Vincent and the Grenadines

Opposition has been voiced locally by NGO’s the Friends of the Tobago Cays and the SVG National Trust based in both Bequia and St. Vincent as to the renewal of the ASW hunt in SVG and the unprecedented “bundling” of the quota request into one resolution with that of the USA, and Russia, where Aboriginal whaling is without doubt a long and necessary tradition. In the case of SVG, the “needs” and aboriginal context are challenged as to their authenticity, by the aforementioned NGO’s and the larger ECCEA membership, that this is not the case in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

### Aboriginal Whaling

The Chairperson of the National Trust oversees all archaeological work that is carried out across St. Vincent and the Grenadines and facilitates the research and documentation of the true history of that nation.

She notes “that never in the history of archaeology in St. Vincent and the Grenadines have there been any findings to suggest that the Kalinago or Garifuna peoples, killed whales, interacted with whales, or ate whale meat. The Kalinago and the Garifuna are the aboriginal peoples of that country.

Over the last several years there have been many archaeological excavations conducted and numerous reports from the International Association of Caribbean Archaeology (IACA), underline that there is no evidence whatsoever of whale hunting by aboriginals across a time span of 4000 years. Neither whale remains nor weapons that could have been used to kill such a large mammals were ever found. Neither are any images of whales inscribed on Vincentian or Caribbean petroglyphs.

The killing of the humpback whales on Bequia is a relic of European and American origin which began in about 1875 by a Scottish settler William Wallace together with his whaling partner a settler of French origin, Joseph Ollivierre. It is not an ‘aboriginal’ activity, it is an activity learnt from the Yankee whalers. Modern day whaling in Bequia is done by persons of mixed European and African descent.

### Economic argument

The killing of humpback whales on Bequia cannot be justified on economic grounds or nutritional needs. Alternative sources of protein can be obtained at cheaper prices on the island of Bequia. Those sources including chicken and certain types of fish.

The alleged need for whale meat in the SVG needs statement to IWC 64 is based on the assumption that a presumed 6,000 persons on Bequia, which may include secondary residents and tourists, actually eat whale meat, which is not the case, as much of the meat is taken to the main island of St. Vincent which is not the intended recipient of the quota that is very specifically awarded to meet the needs of the people of Bequia. We must also look at changes in consumption patterns and food preferences over time. The current trend among young people indicates that whale meat is not a desirable option. A recent High School Survey (2011) which included Bequia students, showed that

only 39% admitted to have ever eaten whale meat. Also, some persons of certain religious faiths on Bequia do not eat whale meat. It is however considered a delicacy and enjoyed by persons especially in the Paget Farm and La Pompe communities.

The most critical economic argument in relation to whaling activities on Bequia is its negative impact on the tourism industry, which the entire Country is heavily dependent upon, including Bequia. It is the largest industry, the biggest employer and the greatest source of foreign exchange revenue. This has been the case since the collapse of the banana industry after the loss of preferential treatment on the European market. The agricultural sector was further destroyed by Hurricane Tomas in 2010; and soon thereafter was hit by the black Sigatoka and Moka diseases which destroyed most of the bananas in 2011 and 2012. These events have caused SVG to be even more dependent on tourism than ever before. The killing of humpback whales in the heart of the main tourism area, the island of Bequia, is extremely damaging to the tourism industry. It is a practice that SVG simply cannot afford as a country to continue. The whaling activities of a small community should not be allowed to have such devastating economic impact on the rest of Vincentian society.

Because of the migratory nature of humpback whales, whale hunting in Bequia is detrimental to the economies of other island states such as the Dominican Republic, Dominica, and the Dutch and French speaking islands, which rely on increasingly lucrative revenues from whale watching.

### **Infractions**

The St Vincent National Trust and the Friends of the Tobago Cays report that:

“It is a well known fact that the Bequia whalers have had a long tradition of hunting mothers and calves, contrary to IWC ASW Regulations. The SVG government has had a history of non compliance with respect to its obligations to the IWC, including absence of adequate measures for the collecting and reporting of data in relation to whaling activities of Bequia.

There is a misrepresentation in the SVG 2012 statement of needs, which reads “where there is wind the boats use their sails while searching for whales and to pursue them”. This statement omits to mention the key role of speed boats in the hunt, including towing the whale boat to the vicinity of the whale to give the appearance of ASW and to tow the dead whale back to shore. Evidence can be seen in the Animal Welfare Report referred to below. Based on numerous eye witness accounts, speedboats are not only used to herd the whales but also to strike whales, and have become a regular component to the hunting activities in recent years. One such strike and loss, where the whale was harpooned from the speed boat and not the whale boat, occurred this past year just outside Admiralty Bay, a spectacle which was viewed by many.

Whale meat is not only sold on mainland St. Vincent but also in neighbouring countries and even to the Vincentian diaspora in the United States, and elsewhere. We also draw your attention the ASW infractions by Whalers on Bequia as set out in the June 2012 Report by the Animal Welfare Institute. Animal welfare interests groups would note that the cold non exploding harpoon is still commonly used, which results in suffering and prolonged death after a whale has been struck.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion and in light of the lack of genuine subsistence needs, commerciality of the catch, record of infractions, animal cruelty and the fact that there is no connection between this hunt and the original ‘aboriginal’ inhabitants of this country but rather was introduced by foreign settlers little more than a century ago, we call on the IWC to reject entirely a proposal for a quota of humpback whales for St. Vincent and the Grenadines to hunt whales under the IWC ASW provision”.