

**Pew/ECCEA
Conference, Martinique February 2010
Comments By Senator Liz Thompson of Barbados**

"Ocean Voices, Lessons from The Whales"

Gosh, I could not help but think that now that I am so fat I am being asked to speak for or on behalf of whales. This has been a very interesting three days of discussions and to conclude it with the voices of the whales is quite a unique touch.

If the whales could speak to us, if we could interpret and dance to their songs, I think the message of the whales would be "let us coexist, the ocean is a big place with food and space for all mammals, man and whales. Your species wants to survive and so does ours. We do not harm you so please do not harm us."

A number of very clear, discrete themes and ideas have in my view been emerging and I want to capture some of those by offering the suggestions which readily emerge from our discussions. They fall under some broad categories.

First the pro-whaling Japanese lobby is strong, persistent, strategic, unwavering and well funded. The anti-whaling lobby must therefore adopt measures to counter the propaganda and efforts of its opponents.

Engaging With Governments and Politicians

I have heard much about "political will," "politicians being 'bought'" and queries about how best to obtain political support. Let me make the point that I am here in my personal capacity and I do not

represent the Government of Barbados or any political Party in Barbados. However, I start from the perspective and premise that politics is an honourable profession, just like science, consultancy, journalism, and all the other professions represented at this meeting. Politicians therefore want to do right, are well intentioned and have the interests of the country and its citizens at heart.

The very difficult challenge which no scientist, journalist, or consultant, will have to face is to explain to the voting residents of a rural fishing village why they cannot have the road, school or fishing market promised to the government by the Japanese and why a whale was more important than they were. In reality those are the kinds of choices which the politician has to make. The politician must, in very difficult economic times, choose between accepting the gift of those who want to continue whaling and in turn giving tangible support to a community of human mammals, persons whom he knows, whose quality of life will be improved by the donation of the foreign government, as against protecting and preserving the whale whom he will never meet and who does not vote in his country.

My suggestion therefore for engaging politicians is twofold. If we want to get the support of the politicians, then in fora such as this we have to move beyond criticism and rhetoric. We must

- Offer them support in the form of projects and tangibles, otherwise they will not listen. And 2) we must conduct or use existing cost benefit analyses to show that properly regulated whale watching has tangible and sustainable benefits for their citizens and country and in this regard we must be prepared to go in and help them establish whale watching industries, train

those who will be participating and even raise financing for potential investors such as fishermen. In this way show politicians and governments that whale watching and protection activities are more beneficial, create positive national images, create jobs and earn foreign exchange.

- Persuade governments that a positive international image and the capacity to employ, feed shelter citizens and promote sustainable activities are to be preferred to “gifts” or aid.

Public Education

Members of the public can be a powerful lobby at the national level. The public can be reached through the media, environmental and other interest groups who are provided with fact based concrete information which they can use with national populations and governments.

- Development of a forum in which scientists can exchange and share information, so that there is a common scientific platform and that given the limited resources to do the work in this are the incidence of unnecessary duplication would be reduced while agencies can build on each other's efforts and achieve more. Also, since these are pelagic populations the need for sharing information is critical.
- Scientists and scientific agencies should also use blogs, Twitter, Face book and the social network media where people are to be found and in which large numbers of people worldwide can be reached.

Whale Watch Not Whale Harassment

It is important for those in the whale watching industry to understand that their role is one of protection and conservation and that they should not engage in practices which harm the whales. To this end perhaps Pew/ECCEA or some other appropriate agency should be encouraged to

- Produce a document showing best practices for the whale watching industry which could be used as a guide and for fishermen, business persons, investors as to what are safe and acceptable practices for whale watching. It should therefore be distributed to relevant Ministries, tourism agencies, organisations and cooperatives of fisher folk and those involved in the industry.
- A few individuals should be trained so that they can go to various geographic regions and assist train persons in the industry and with relevant stakeholders in the public and private sectors.

Targeting Interest Groups

It has occurred to me that we need to target interest groups -

- The cruise industry and cruise liners who need to understand that the activities on which they are insisting are harmful. We should try to meet with directors of the cruise industry and make them more aware of what constitutes safe and acceptable whale watching. It is not possible to effect change in the market unless there is an intervention at both ends of the industry. That is, we have to deal both with supply and demand, the service supplied by the fisherman and the demand of the consumer who in this case is the tourist or the cruise director/ship captain. This would be analogous to the very effective intervention with IMO and should involve CHTA< CTO and those important umbrella agencies.

- Not only should the media be targeted but the media in all pro-whaling countries, especially in Japan should be given photographs, information on the methods used to massacre whales, the level of expenditure of tax dollars used to give gifts and in other ways subsidise the whaling industry and protect a few pockets in the name of a culture that has clearly changed at the community level but not at the level of government. Consideration should also be given to finding alternative activity or industry for those fishers who now make a living from whaling. I say this because even if there is not a market but government is going to pay them, then they will keep whaling but if they have a viable alternative to generate revenue then they may be persuaded to do that instead.
- Sensitising vets is also an important activity and information should be distributed not only to chief veterinary officers but to vets associations. In the Caribbean and Pacific since the numbers cannot be large then they are easier to reach and even to offer some sort of free online training which they can access.

Having made these suggestions I urge that we find a way to take them forward and that can only be done if we assign activities to various people or agencies and if funding is provided to assist with achieving the targets.