

Opening address by Mr Bruno Mainini, Chair, International Whaling Commission

I'd like to start by thanking the Government of Sri Lanka for its generosity in hosting this workshop, and the Government of Australia for its support.

I'd also like to thank the Sri Lankan Institute of Policy Research, Murdoch University's Cetacean Research Unit, and representatives from the whalewatching industry and the IWC Scientific Committee. They will all share their experience and knowledge with us over the next three days, and I'm grateful for both their expertise and their time.

Most importantly though, I must thank every attendee, who has chosen to travel here and support this event. The response has been extremely positive and I hope everyone involved, in every capacity, will learn from these discussions

The IWC is an organisation that never stops learning. Knowledge has been fundamental to the organisation from its earliest days when a Scientific Committee was established to develop our understanding of whale populations and numbers. This work continues today - and this search for knowledge has expanded into many other areas. In 1946 there were a handful of scientists advising the IWC. Now there is a scientific committee of around two hundred people, a fast-growing conservation committee, a welfare work programme and much more. The IWC is seventy years old this year and learning has never been more important.

As our knowledge has grown, our role in the world has evolved too. The IWC remains the international regulator of commercial and subsistence whaling. It's now also involved in many other issues related to the conservation of whales - from climate change and ocean noise to chemical pollution and oil spill preparedness. On all these issues, a key aim is not just to increase our knowledge, but to share it.

As an inter-governmental organisation, the IWC is well-placed to share knowledge and spread best practice. Increasingly, the IWC is using its global reach in this way, and I'd like to give a practical example:

Some of you may have heard of the Global Entanglement Response Network. It's a capacity building initiative, addressing the increasing concern over whale entanglement in fishing gear and marine debris. In 2011, the IWC brought together experts from a number of countries who developed best practice guidelines which were then used to develop a training programme for safe and effective entanglement response. This training programme is now available to national governments and so far, over five hundred nominees from more than twenty countries have received training and developed their own national response capability. Last November, the programme came to the Indian Ocean region for the first time, through a training workshop held in Oman, which I understand was extremely successful.

The entanglement programme also provides a good example of what the IWC is not. The IWC is not a regulator or enforcer of entanglement response anywhere in the world. This is very clearly the role of national governments. Instead, the IWC provides advice and training only through national governments and at their invitation. We recognise that places and circumstances can be very different - different in terms of geography, infrastructure, resources and so on. Even the most constructive guidelines will fail if they're not tailored to individual circumstances - and the people best placed to implement best practice or interpret

advice in a particular region or country, are the local governments and the people in that region or country.

The entanglement response programme is the most established example of the IWC's learning and sharing approach. In addition, I'm pleased to say that we're working in the same way on a range of other issues including the development of an expert network to respond to stranded whales and dolphins; development of an intranet site which will provide a platform for scientists around the world to exchange information on cetacean disease; a global ship strikes database which will collate and analyse information and of course, the whalewatching strategy.

I will leave it to others to talk in detail about the IWC's work on whalewatching. I will simply say that the principles I have mentioned here very much apply. The IWC aim is to develop best practice and whalewatching resources that are as helpful and accessible as possible. And I must finish where I started, by recalling that the IWC never stops learning. Feedback from you on your experiences and requirements is invaluable to us in developing resources that are as useful as possible. And so I will finish by wishing everyone a useful and constructive workshop. Thank you.