

TONY BLAIR URGED TO TAKE URGENT ACTION TO STOP SLIDE TOWARDS RESUMPTION OF COMMERCIAL WHALING

***Leading environmental groups with 8 million supporters come together
to call for stronger action from Government to halt massive increase in
whaling***

The Whale Group of Wildlife and Countryside Link, an alliance of the UK's leading environmental organisations, is calling on Tony Blair to urgently step up UK diplomatic pressure to halt Japan's attempts to overwhelm an international conservation treaty and facilitate the resumption of commercial whaling for the first time in two decades.

At successive meetings of the International Whaling Commission (IWC), the body tasked with the management of whale conservation and whaling, Japan has increased the pro-whaling vote by offering overseas fisheries aid to developing countries which agree to vote with them. Their ultimate goal is a full-scale resumption of the commercial hunting of whales, overturning the international moratorium which came into force in 1986.

The 2006 International Whaling Commission (IWC) meeting will take place in June in St Kitts & Nevis. Conservation and welfare groups are concerned that Japan's aggressive vote-buying will inevitably result in a pro-whaling majority – a very real threat at this meeting (the pro-whaling majority was nearly achieved last year), allowing them to eliminate the conservation mandate of the Commission and focus solely on catch allocation.

Despite the moratorium, Japan, Norway and Iceland have been steadily increasing their self-awarded catch of whale kills year on year: Japan and Iceland through the scientific whaling loophole and Norway through objection to the moratorium. Over 2,000 whales will be targeted this year alone.

John Frizell, Chair of Link's Whale group said:

“Last weekend Tony Blair witnessed the nation's innate passion for whales in the fate of heroic but ultimately tragic efforts to save one single stranded whale in the Thames. Yet thousands more whales could face an unnecessary death from harpoons if Japan and the other whaling nations get their way at this year's IWC. This letter is to urge Tony Blair to heed the voice of our 8 million members and the nation by taking strong Government action to put a stop to the slaughter which is a disaster for whale conservation efforts“.

Whilst today's letter recognises that the UK Government has taken firm action in opposing commercial whaling in the past, it is now clear that only high level diplomatic action can counter the very real threat posed to the world's remaining whale populations at this year's IWC.



NOTES

- (1) Copies of today's letter to Tony Blair can be obtained from Greenpeace Press Office at 020 7865 8255
- (2) Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) brings together voluntary organisations concerned with the conservation, enjoyment and protection of wildlife, the countryside and the marine environment. Together our members have the support of over 8 million people in the UK. Link's Whale group focuses on the annual International Whaling Commission (IWC) meeting and whaling by IWC members, as well as addressing UK policy on other threats to cetaceans e.g. noise pollution. See www.wcl.org.uk for further information.

CONTACTS

GP: Willie Mackenzie - 020 7865 8253
willie.mackenzie@uk.greenpeace.org

EIA: Claire Bass - 020 7354 7972
ClaireBass@eia-international.org

IFAW: Clare Sterling – 020 7587 6708, mobile 07917 507717,
csterling@ifaw.org

WDCS: Emma Butler – 01249 449 500
emma.butler@wdcs.org

WWF UK: Rob McNeil - 01483 412 375, mobile 07867 697519,
rmcneil@wwf.org.uk