

CLIVE McMAHON

International majority supports whale protection

Southern right whales live only in the Southern Hemisphere, mainly between 20°S and 55°S. They mate and calve during the winter in the inshore waters of Chile, Argentina, Brazil, South Africa, southern Australia and some Southern Hemisphere islands, then migrate to waters nearer Antarctica to feed.

This year's meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) in Ulsan, Korea, saw delegates from the majority of voting States condemn a proposal to expand so-called scientific whaling in the Southern Ocean and vote to continue the moratorium on commercial whaling. The outcome was welcomed by Australian Antarctic programme scientists and policy staff, who are working to advance the Government's goal of permanently ending commercial whaling and scientific whaling.

The 57th IWC meeting (20–24 June) was attended by 59 voting member governments. Six new members have joined since the last meeting (Cameroon, the Czech Republic, Kiribati, Luxembourg, Nauru and the Slovak Republic). Australia's delegation was led by the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Senator Ian Campbell, while Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) scientists and policy advisers played key roles in the meetings of the Plenary, Scientific Committee, Conservation Committee and various working groups.

Significant outcomes for Australia included:

- Japan's proposal to lift the moratorium on commercial whaling was rejected.

- More than half of the countries represented at the IWC's Scientific Committee meeting were critical of Japan's proposed expanded scientific whaling programme. The majority voted for a Resolution urging Japan to withdraw its proposal.
- The Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary and the Indian Ocean Whale Sanctuary were retained and there was majority support for the proposed South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary (although insufficient votes for it to come into force). Strong support was also received for a South Pacific Whale Sanctuary, which Australia has been promoting for several years.
- The newly established Conservation Committee set its initial programme of work, which will include investigating the impact of ships on whales.
- A proposal to remove conservation-related items from the agenda of IWC annual meetings was defeated.
- A Resolution to hold a workshop in conjunction with the 58th IWC meeting, on whale-killing methods and associated welfare issues, was adopted.

The IWC will next meet in St Kitts and Nevis in the Caribbean in June 2006. Before then, AAD staff will participate in a working group on the Revised Management Scheme for commercial whaling and continue to highlight the major deficiencies of the proposal. The AAD will also host a workshop on a comprehensive assessment of Southern Hemisphere humpback whales to help determine the size of humpback populations.

—CATHY BRUCE

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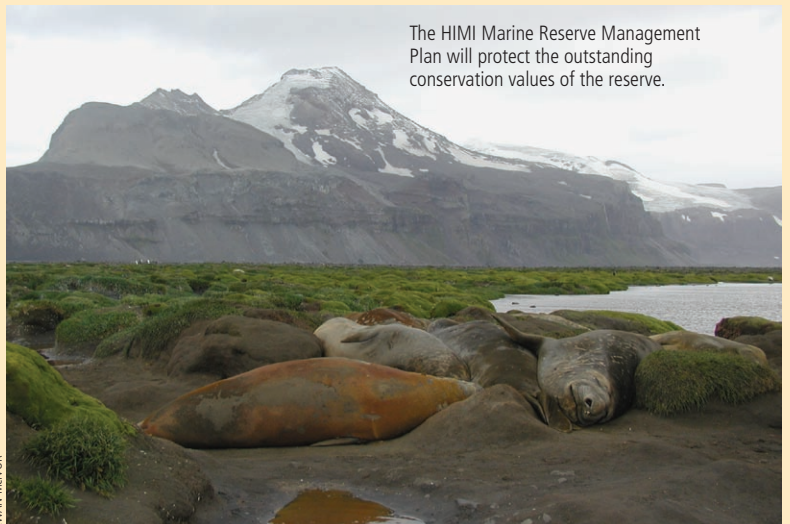
Marine Reserve management plan in force

The Heard Island and McDonald Islands Marine Reserve Management Plan has been approved by Parliament and will now guide management of the reserve for the next seven years.

The plan details the way in which activities must be undertaken to protect the outstanding conservation values of the reserve. It also recognises the important contribution that scientific research in the reserve can make to issues such as the effects of global and regional climate change, and the sustainable management of the broader marine area surrounding the reserve. Copies of the plan can be downloaded from the Heard Island website: <<http://www.heardisland.aq>> or by emailing himi@aad.gov.au.

—EWAN McIVOR

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The HIMI Marine Reserve Management Plan will protect the outstanding conservation values of the reserve.