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Prime Minister's Office
Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir
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Iceland

9th February 2009

Dear Prime Minister Sigurðardóttir,

On behalf of our millions of members and supporters worldwide, WWF would like to congratulate and welcome you and your administration.

WWF has a long history of work in the Arctic region, which is now a higher conservation priority than ever. Since 1992, WWF's Arctic Programme has been working with our partners to preserve the region's rich biodiversity, to ensure that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and to reduce pollution and wasteful consumption.

WWF also has a long history of work on whales, including efforts to ensure whaling is brought under effective international control, and that the world's whales are able to thrive and recover from the previous unsustainable whaling activities of the last century. As you will know, most of the world's great whale species were driven almost to the brink of extinction by unsustainable whaling, and although the international moratorium on commercial whaling has been a huge success in allowing these species and populations to recover, some species remain dangerously depleted. For example, the Svalbard-Barents Sea (Spitsbergen) subpopulation of bowhead whales was listed as critically endangered during the last 2008 IUCN Red List Assessment.

These past experiences have demonstrated the inherent vulnerability of whale populations, and the potential damage that uncontrolled whaling activities can cause. As such, although WWF acknowledges the widely varied cultural attitudes towards the conservation and management of whales, WWF continues to oppose commercial whaling, especially in light of the host of threats faced by whales including climate change, ship strikes, chemical and acoustic pollution and bycatch, now and until whales stocks have recovered, and the governments of the world have brought whaling under international control with a precautionary and conservation-based enforceable management and compliance system adhered to by all whaling nations. We now know that climate change in particular is an increasing threat to whales, and will exacerbate all other threats to this species group. We therefore we cannot be complacent in working to reduce all other threats to whales.

Unfortunately the International Whaling Commission (IWC) has so far not managed to secure such a conservation-based enforceable management and compliance system, adhered to by all whaling nations. Whales are highly migratory animals, and as such, are a global resource, whose management must be

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international in nature, or will fail. It is for this reason that WWF opposes whaling under objection to the moratorium, as practiced currently by Iceland.

The recent decision of the ex-minister of fisheries to increase the whaling quota to 100 minke whales (up from 40 minke whales last year) and increase the quota of fin whales (an endangered species) from just nine whales to 150, is not in line with current international efforts to bring whaling under international control, and threatens the reputation of Iceland internationally at a time when positive international relations are increasingly important. WWF is therefore extremely heartened to hear news that your administration will be reviewing the recent decision of the ex-minister of fisheries about increasing the whaling quota for the next five years.

WWF urges Iceland, in this time of economic difficulty and new leadership, to take a forward looking and modern stance on whale management and conservation. Whaling is important for cultural and subsistence reasons for a small number of communities around the world, but increasingly less viable as a commercial enterprise due to both public opinion and economics. Demand for whale meat in traditional high whale consumption countries such as Japan is most likely declining, as indicated by falling prices and growing stockpiles of whale meat. Whale watching on the other hand, was recognised as a US\$ 1 billion industry in 2001, active in more than 492 communities and 87 nations, and is growing at a faster rate than world tourism generally. Direct expenditures on whale watching tours have increased from US \$77 million in 1991 to more than US \$ 300 million, an average annual increase of 21 %. Iceland is no exception, with a healthy and thriving whale watching industry.

WWF urges Iceland to engage constructively in the current dialogue taking place within the IWC to redefine its future. The IWC will only be able to fulfil its mandate as an effective conservation and management body for the world's whales if all governments work together cooperatively, without objection, and in full agreement.

WWF remains at your service to provide any information you may feel useful during this review.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Susan Lieberman
Director, WWF International Species Programme

Dr. Neil Hamilton
Director, WWF International Artic Programme

Cc:

Minister for the Environment, Kolbrún Halldórsdóttir
Minister of Foreign Affairs, Industry, Energy and Tourism, Össur Skarphéðinsson
Minister of Finance and Minister of Fisheries and Agriculture, Steingrímur J. Sigfússon