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PROPOSAL 4: MINKE WHALE

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CITES Parties at COP13 assess this proposal on its merits and not be influenced by the political issues that have divided the 58 members of the International Whaling Commission (IWC).

Japan's proposal to transfer from Appendix I to Appendix II three stocks of minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostris*) meets the criteria for approval at COP13.

- Abundance estimates from both the IWC and the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO) demonstrate that these stocks of minke whale are not endangered.
- The CITES Secretariat, IUCN and Traffic acknowledge that the stocks do not meet the biological criteria for listing on Appendix I.
- Regulations and management controls in place in Japan fully satisfy the precautionary measures of Annex 4 of Resolution Conf. 9.24.
- Japan has a DNA register to track whale meat trade and detect illegal whale meat.
- Japan has legislation that prevents any trade with countries that are not members of the IWC.

Why transfer the proposed stocks of minke whale?

The irony of Japan's minke whale proposal is that a transfer to Appendix II will not change anything. Japan, Norway and Iceland have reservations on the Appendix-I listing of the minke whale and can legally trade with each other now if they so wish. (In fact, Norway traded minke whale with Iceland in 2002, 2003 and 2004, and also with the Faroe Islands in 2003.)

But there is clearly a principle at stake. If a species does not meet the biological criteria for inclusion in Appendix I, then it should be transferred to Appendix II. Unfortunately, too many political reasons are used for keeping the minke whale on Appendix I. Resolution Conf. 11.4 (Rev COP12), although influencing the Secretariat's comments and recommendation, does not bind the Parties in their considerations.

SMS believes that CITES members could play an important role in encouraging the completion of the RMS and thereby normalising the whaling industry when the moratorium on commercial whaling is lifted. Furthermore, CITES, as representing the views of 166 countries, should have primacy over the views of 28 countries of the IWC that oppose commercial whaling. CITES Parties are well placed to send a strong signal to the IWC by approving Japan's proposal. A downlisting could act as a catalyst for encouraging the IWC to complete and implement the Revised Management Scheme (RMS) in a timely manner.

A rational and objective approach to the long-term conservation of these stocks of minke whale, by both CITES and the IWC, would provide the necessary legal framework for implementing appropriate ecosystem-based management regimes based on sustainable harvesting and regulated international trade.

For further information, please consult the Species Management Specialists' "Guide to COP13".