

RES 077 Urgent measures to secure the survival of the critically endangered Western Gray Whales (*Eschrichtius robustus*)

RECOGNIZING that the Western Gray Whale population is one of the world's smallest populations of large whales, with about 100 individuals remaining, including only 23 reproductive females, and that this population is therefore listed by IUCN as Critically Endangered;

CONCERNED that the population was reduced to this very low level by over-hunting in the early part of the 20th century and now is facing new threats from oil and gas development on its only known feeding ground;

FURTHER CONCERNED that the near-shore feeding ground is less than 70 km long and up to 10 km wide and that this habitat is critical to population survival as it is the only known place where females with calves feed and calves are weaned;

GREATLY TROUBLED that large oil companies Sakhenergy (Shell, Mitsubishi and Mitsui), Exxon and BP, and their Russian partners, have started major oil-development projects in the waters off Northeastern Sakhalin Island, Russian Federation, that are directly surrounding and encroaching upon the feeding habitat of Western Gray Whales and that the cumulative impacts of these projects (individually, collectively and sequentially) have not been considered explicitly by the oil companies or by their international lenders;

AWARE that Western Gray Whales feed primarily on benthic organisms, that their feeding ground (the Piltun Area) is very limited, and that the risk posed by a major oil spill to the near-shore ecosystem and benthic community is very high as containment of oil would be extremely difficult and prevailing currents in the area could cause spilled oil to spread across the whale feeding habitat;

NOTING and welcoming the concerns for this population expressed by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) in Resolution 2001-3, which urges that "every effort must be made to reduce anthropogenic mortality to zero and to reduce various types of anthropogenic disturbances to the lowest possible level";

MINDFUL of further similar concerns expressed by the IWC in subsequent years;

RECALLING that the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) Cetacean Specialist Group, in its current Conservation Action Plan, *Dolphins, Whales and Porpoises: 2002-2010 Conservation Action Plan for the World's Cetaceans* (2003), has identified the population of Western Gray Whales as one of several populations of great whales that are severely depleted;

FURTHER RECALLING that the SSC Cetacean Specialist Group has provided scientific and technical advice to the proponents of the Sakhalin oil development projects regarding risk assessment and mitigation; and

NOTING that IUCN has undertaken an independent scientific review of the impacts on Western Gray Whales of oil and gas development plans on and near Sakhalin Island;

The World Conservation Congress at its 3rd Session in Bangkok, Thailand, 17-25 November 2004:

1. REQUESTS the IUCN Director General, with the assistance of IUCN's members, Commissions, and Council, to promote the protection of Western Gray Whales throughout their range, particularly their feeding ground off Sakhalin Island;
2. CAUTIONS that any additional negative impact on Western Gray Whales could lead to their extinction;

3. URGES all the range state governments (including China, Japan, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Republic of Korea, and the Russian Federation) to immediately develop and implement their own national action plans for the conservation of Western Gray Whales and their habitat;
4. ENCOURAGES all involved oil companies to establish independent monitoring programmes that meet international best-practice standards, as agreed by the SSC Cetacean Specialist Group, and that are subjected to independent review by parties with no vested interests;
5. EMPHASIZES the importance of developing and implementing effective mitigation measures that reduce potential anthropogenic impacts to the lowest possible level, in accordance with IWC Resolution 2001-3, prior to the onset of any major construction work on the Sakhalin Shelf in 2005; and
6. REQUESTS the Russian authorities to establish an area which is seasonally closed to activities which may have an adverse impact on Western Gray Whales (mothers and calves) during the time that they are present each year.

The Department of State, United States, provided the following statement for the record:

State and agency members United States refrained from engaging in deliberations on this motion and took no national government position on the motion as adopted for reasons given in the US General Statement on the IUCN Resolution Process.