

Testimony of Congressman Les AuCoin
House Concurrent Resolution 92
May 24, 1979
Before the Subcommittee on International Organizations
House Committee on Foreign Affairs

Mr. Chairman. My remarks today before the Subcommittee on International Organizations serve one goal: to urge the necessity for the United States to negotiate an indefinite moratorium on commercial whale killing at the July meeting of the International Whaling Commission.

House Concurrent Resolution 92 which I have introduced would enable the United States to negotiate for a ban on commercial whale killing with far more efficacy than the delegation could presently wield. Although President Carter has certainly shown his favor of a moratorium through an executive message to the IWC and by signing the Marine Mammal Protection Act, the Administration lacks the congressional support of a national commitment to negotiate this measure in the international sphere. The passage of my resolution along with other legislative guards to the whale populations of the high seas would bolster that posture before the IWC this July.

Why is congressional endorsement of an indefinite moratorium imperative?

None of us need be reminded of the severe threat commercial whaling practices levy against the noblest of marine mammals. One whale is slaughtered, either by industrial harpoons or pirating techniques, every 22 minutes; that's over 66 per day. Present management measures under the IWC simply do not protect the dwindling wild stocks of whale species adequately.

Already those populations may never regain a self-sustaining level.

Last December, the IWC ruled that industrial catches of sperm whales could total 3,800, 20% of which could be female whales. Although this represents a 41% cut in the previous year's quota, it nonetheless was a decision based on political considerations and counter to scientifically concrete advice. Political considerations proved the overriding factor in this decision as Japan and the USSR pressed heavily for quotas in the name of industrial survival.

A ramified U.S. position against this industrial stance is possible with congressional endorsement of a commercial moratorium. Let's consider this "industrial need." The demand for whale products in other countries constitutes a demonstrated need for sperm oil. Yet despite the high level of sperm oil consumption on certain national markets, modern technology can surely supply an adequate substitute.

While the size of a sperm whale can vary substantially, roughly 3.5 tons of sperm oil are yielded per whale taken. The USSR in 1976 consumed the equivalent of 11,000 sperm whales -- that's 38,500 tons of sperm oil! At this level of industrial take, the endangered existence of the sperm whale justifies an imposed substitution. There is simply no reason to hunt this graceful mammal to the state of extinction solely for the argument of insufficient substitute of its product. The United States banned all whale products in 1971, stimulating research for sperm

oil substitutes and thereby lowering consumption of whale oil products in other countries. Our cosmetic, tanning and other related industries have clearly survived, but it's still questionable whether the sperm whale will be permitted the same future.

With congressional support of a commercial moratorium, the U.S. team to the IWC can take a firmer stance on those negotiable matters to protect the cetacean populations. Trade barriers and bans, protection of habitats and surveys will resultingly shield the whale populations from inimical harpoons and will also permit scientific expertise to document cetacean population statistics more objectively than do the industrial reports now.

Let me emphasize that House Concurrent Resolution 92 addresses the inequities of commercial whale killing, not aboriginal. It has previously been argued that a U.S. endorsement of a moratorium presents a prejudicial treatment of the American Eskimo. I would like to point out that the real threat to the survival of this endangered species looms in the 90-millimeter cannon of the industrial whaling fleets, not in the relatively small aboriginal take of the Eskimo. For the sustenance and cultural use of the bowhead whale by these northern Indians can hardly be equated with the motive of profit. These are two separate and distinct reasons for whale hunting. One expresses a cultural heritage serving human survival, the other a grandiose harvest for a profit margin.

I recognize that the former delegations to the International Whaling Commission have negotiated in good faith for the protection of this unique and intelligent mammal. I applaud the progress Dr. Richard Frank, Dr. William Aron and Mr. Tom Garrett have accomplished in past meetings, yet we must not relinquish our efforts to save the endangered whale. A congressional mandate would contribute to strengthening the U.S. leadership in this negotiating progress. House Concurrent Resolution 92 would provide that tangible proof of strength.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.