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## **IWMC Opening Statement to NAMMCO 28<sup>th</sup> meeting**

Allow me to extend my sincere gratitude to the Commission for inviting IWMC to the 28<sup>th</sup> Meeting of NAMMCO.

The world is still holding its breath while watching the COVID-19 pandemic tightening its grip around our societies. There was a time before and there will be a time after COVID. What our lives will look like after the virus has gotten under control is still shrouded in mystery.

COVID-19 is probably *the* most spoken about topic worldwide. Not surprisingly, also international environmental governance is not shielded from it. To the contrary: when looking at the websites of all major conventions, COVID-19 surfaces. Not least because in-person meetings have been replaced by online ones. The entire structure of decision-making is now dependent on the internet.

But this is not the only effect the pandemic has on the sphere of environmental governance. Since cases were exposed that the virus has sprung from animals to humans, we hear calls to reduce or even ban use, trade in wild species to prevent further mutation of the virus and thereby to reduce the risk of its more aggressive spread.

Like Climate change, Zoonotic diseases are nothing new though. There are countless examples throughout ancient and modern history that demonstrate how the proximity between humans and animals has triggered diseases that have drastically affected human societies. The novel SARS-CoV-2 virus is but another virus that finds humans and animals equally attractive. And like before, there is no need to reduce international wildlife trade because of a new disease.

Who would argue that local marine mammal consumption contributes to the spread of the coronavirus? Who would argue that it contributes to climate change? And who would argue that hunting whales and seals locally in small numbers by indigenous and local populations adversely affects the environment? In all likelihood, nobody would challenge our view that it is best left to the locals to consume what is in front of their doorsteps.

Besides, we do have the UN on our side as well. After all, in December 2018 the General Assembly adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. This declaration also makes those in the fisheries sector its subjects and those with

a close relationship to the lands and seas that they have been living with for generations. If the UN accepts this view, why not others?

COVID-19 will be around for a while still. Climate change will be around for a while still. Nothing new! But if we don't pay attention, our local communities won't be around for long anymore. On the other hand, we shall not allow COVID-19 and Global warming to become an excuse for prohibiting the harvesting and use of marine resources, thus destroying, without valid motives, the livelihoods of people whose culture and traditions are based on these resources.

Let's hope that the current situation will not prevent NAMMCO from fulfilling its mission "to maintain" the equilibrium between humankind and the marine resources.

With my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Lapointe', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Eugene Lapointe

IWMC President

Former Secretary General of CITES (1982-1990)