



Switzerland, March 2023

IWMC Opening Statement

Within the last few months, the protection of the natural environment has attracted a significant amount of media attention. First, the climate conference in Sharm-el-Sheikh, then the Biodiversity Conference in Montreal, and lastly, the BBNJ negotiations in New York. Some have even gone so far as to label these meetings and their respective outcomes a major success, historic, and landmarks. Especially the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), which was concluded in Montreal, and the adopted text for the BBNJ Agreement in New York triggered these responses. The world is saved, it seems.

What is missing is the fact that texts don't mean much if they are not properly implemented. And 'proper implementation' means that it is not only states that make these instruments work, but it must also be people. Unfortunately, it is especially indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) who are completely missing from the picture. This is probably best represented by the fact that several countries strove to change the CITES listing criteria by including issues such as food security and livelihoods — which, arguably, would have made CITES much more effective. But the majority of CITES Parties chose to keep the criteria as they are, much to the disadvantage of IPLCs. The same can be said about the IWC, where several states tabled a resolution on food security, meaning the link of a discourse on food security with whales, which would have been especially relevant for developing states and, ultimately, for IPLCs. Not surprisingly, however, also the IWC opted for its already known path: no link between whales and food security!

This situation is somewhat reminiscent of Morpheus offering Neo the red and the blue pill in *The Matrix*. While Neo chose the red pill and with it the willingness to learn and engage in life-changing adventures, CITES and the IWC chose the blue pill and decided to dream in their used-up waters until, maybe, something ever changes.

But let us do away with the negativity. For in spite of these shortcomings elsewhere, there are also successes. The BBNJ Agreement — despite its somewhat technical and NGO-infused character — contains many provisions for the proper consultation of and respect for IPLCs. Also the GBF is to pay due respect to indigenous land and cultural rights, which is especially relevant when implementing the SDG3 Target. And indeed, against this backdrop, NAMMCO can serve as a shining example for the proper inclusion of IPLCs and the respect for livelihoods and food security concerns. While being a regional organisation, its proper functioning and consensus-driven nature can teach the world a valuable lesson: that those who are interested in sustainably using components of biodiversity have an equally important interest in conserving it. Once that becomes clear, we believe many a conflict can be overcome.

It is in this spirit that we wish the 30th meeting of the NAMMCO Council a successful meeting!