



By Antigua and Barbuda Coalition for the Protection of Whales

In response to Daven Joseph's recent article, the Antigua and Barbuda Coalition for the Protection of Whales, a group of nine local environmental NGOs, would like to respond to some of the statements made by our Commissioner to the International Whaling Commission (IWC).

We are in full agreement with Ambassador Joseph that Antigua and Barbuda maintains the sovereign right to manage living resources in our exclusive economic zone responsibly. We have exercised that responsibility by adopting the Environmental Protection and Management Act 2019, which clearly states that all whales are protected within our waters and prohibits them from being hunted and killed. Yet, he considers that what Antigua and Barbuda has decided is appropriate for whales in our waters should not apply to whales in the rest of the world.

Ambassador Joseph continues to make the argument that commercial whaling is

Whaling stance puts Antigua and Barbuda's reputation at risk

needed to ensure food security and livelihoods. Yet, Antigua and Barbuda has never been a whaling nation, and we have never eaten whale meat. He talks a lot about science-based whaling being a sustainable use of marine resources, but he does not acknowledge the high costs of regulating the hunting of species that are considered a global commons to ensure that it is sustainable and well managed — costs that would likely far outweigh any contribution that whale meat might make to our food security or the livelihoods of our people.

He also does not address the question of whether Antigua, as a whaling nation, would be prepared to pay these costs, consistent with the well-established 'user pays' principle in global fisheries policy, under which those who commercially use a shared resource should bear the costs associated with its management. Nor does he acknowledge that the IWC spent almost 14 years and held more than 20 meetings trying to negotiate a whaling management scheme that would meet



Image Coalition logo

the monitoring and enforcement standards expected in modern fisheries. Those negotiations broke down because the whaling nations were simply not prepared to pay the substantial costs involved, estimated at millions of US dollars annually, to implement the vessel-monitoring and international observer schemes that would be needed as a bare minimum, as well as the ongoing at-sea monitoring of whale populations needed to ensure that quotas remain sustainable in the face of environmental challenges such as climate change.

Ambassador Joseph does not deny that our votes at the IWC over the last few decades are a quid pro quo for US\$200 million in funding from Japan

over the last 20 years, and he himself has received Japan's highest honour for his advocacy at the IWC. Does he hope to persuade Japan to help Antigua pay the costs of the IWC regulating whaling in the future? That seems unlikely, considering that Japan left the IWC seven years ago and would not itself be bound by any new whaling rules.

Ambassador Joseph identifies that 70 per cent of our economy is ocean-based but does not acknowledge how much of that economic value depends on Antigua and Barbuda's international reputation. Right now, we are riding high: the Rt Hon Gaston Browne has established himself as a strong voice on the international stage; Antigua and Barbuda hosted the SIDS4 conference in 2024, has played a prominent role in international efforts on climate change and is now preparing to host the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in November.

But international reputations can be lost far more quickly than they are built. The contradiction of criminalising whaling in our waters while vociferously advocating for its resumption in the rest of the world is not only hypocritical but also seriously risks damaging our international reputation, including in the eyes of potential tourists and investors, at a time when the entire world will be watching CHOGM. We should be protecting the reputation we have worked so hard to build, not putting it at risk over a service to Japan that offers no benefit to our people and may be extremely costly.

For more information, please visit our website at <https://www.antiguaprotect-whales.org/>



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