

Ms. Maite Emily Nkoana-Mashabane
Minister of International Relations and Cooperation
South Africa Government

Mr. Marthinus Van Schalkwyk,
Minister of Tourism
South Africa Government

June 08, 2012

Honorable Ministers,

The undersigned civil society organizations from Latin America and The Caribbean, representing millions of people, would like to respectfully request that the Government of South Africa considers reinstating its formal co-sponsorship and active support for the South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary proposal, which will be presented to the International Whaling Commission at its 64th Annual Meeting in Panama next July.

South Africa has been a supporter and a co-sponsor of this highly important proposal since its inception. In 2004 the government of South Africa clearly announced its State policy when noting to the Commission that it no longer was a whaling country and that it had no intention of ever returning to this practice. It also reported that the nation benefits greatly from whale watching and that it considers this form of non-consumptive use as the preferable means by which its people, and poor communities in particular, gain from the presence of whales along its coast¹.

Since 1991, whale watchers in South Africa have increased from six thousand to more than half a million people, generating over 61 million dollars in 2008². The creation of the South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary will guarantee the long-term protection of key species for whale watching such as southern right, humpback and Bryde's whale as well as the sustainability of the industry in worldwide renowned destinations such as Hermanus, Cape Town and Mosselbay, among many others. In this regard the establishment of the South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary will foster the economic benefits of local communities in the region through whale watching as a key catalyst to regional ecotourism.

However, the increasing pressure from some nations to revitalize large-scale commercial whaling in international waters – specially in the Southern Hemisphere - seriously threatens endangered and

¹ Chairs Report 56th Annual Meeting of the IWC (2004)

² O'Connor, S., Campbell, R., Cortez, H., & Knowles, T., 2009, *Whale Watching Worldwide: tourism numbers, expenditures and expanding economic benefits*, a special report from the International Fund for Animal Welfare, Yarmouth MA, USA, prepared by Economists at Large.

vulnerable whale species during their migration and permanence outside national jurisdiction waters of coastal States. We sincerely believe that the creation of the South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary is essential to close this gap and completely in line with South Africa's view to assert its right to non-consumptive use and its right to have a stake, through the IWC in the management and conservation of whales on the high seas³.

As a co-sponsor for several years and as range state of the proposed sanctuary, South Africa has proudly highlighted its record on the conservation and use of marine resources and to its chosen policy of the sustainable use of whales through whale watching, an activity described by the country in 2007 as having contributed significantly to the social and economic needs of its impoverished coastal communities. That same year, the government of South Africa affirmed that it believed it had an obligation to ensure that whale resources are protected and therefore supported creation of the sanctuary⁴.

Consequently it came as an unfortunate surprise the announcement a few years later that South Africa no longer co-sponsored the South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary proposal.

We hope that such position can be reconsidered in full at the highest level of the Government, so that the common interests of our States and people regarding whale conservation in both sides of the Atlantic prevail, and we can have the privilege of once again counting on South Africa as a co-sponsor of the South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary proposal.

Thank you for your kind attention, we look forward for your reply so as to inform our members and followers about this important and sensitive matter for millions of people of our region and around the world.

Respectfully Yours,

³ Chairs Report 56th Annual Meeting of the International Whaling Commission (2004)

⁴ Chair Report, 59th Annual Meeting of the International Whaling Commission (2007)

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