

Outlook for sustainable use in light of IWC69 and the upcoming CITES CoP20

The recent 69th meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC69) provided a sobering reminder of the challenges and opportunities facing the Sustainable Use Community. Though I was unable to attend in person—a first since 1994—it was clear, even from afar, that the spirit of cooperation and determination among like-minded nations remains resilient.

Reflecting on IWC69 which I followed online, I experienced a spectrum of emotions that mirrors the broader struggle for sustainable use. The frustration of witnessing a persistent disconnect between evidence-based policy and political posturing was palpable. The incomprehension of seeing an essential proposal on food security, so harmoniously aligned with human rights, dismissed by those who ought to champion such principles, was profound. Yet, amidst these challenges, admiration grew for the small yet steadfast coalition of nations—Antigua and Barbuda, Ghana, and others—that stood resolutely for their basic rights.

Their resilience underscores a crucial lesson: the power of unity and coordination, even among a "marginalised" minority, to shape the outcomes of international deliberations. While the results of IWC69 fell short of our aspirations, the commitment and integrity displayed by these nations deserve the highest respect. This unity, combined with the unwavering support of allies like Japan, sets a benchmark for how we approach the upcoming CITES CoP20.

The struggles witnessed at IWC69 are not isolated; they resonate across other forums, including CITES. During the same week, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) pro-use bloc held firm against the African Elephant Coalition in a Dialogue meeting in Botswana. While the outcomes of that meeting are still unfolding, the pro-use community demonstrated its ability to achieve incremental progress, exemplified by the updating of Annotation 10. These victories, however modest, reaffirm the value of persistence and strategy.

Looking ahead to CITES CoP20, the Sustainable Use Community has a profound opportunity to build on these experiences. We must strengthen our alliances, refine our messaging, and focus on delivering outcomes that bridge the gap between conservation and the legitimate

needs of people. The lessons of IWC69 remind us that, while we often face overwhelming opposition, success is possible when nations work together with determination and clarity of purpose.

For the Sustainable Use Community, this could herald a new era. The solidarity displayed at IWC69 and in Botswana reveals a growing recognition of our shared goals across regions and treaties. With this momentum, we have the potential to redefine the narrative of sustainable use—shifting it from a defensive posture to a proactive, forward-looking agenda. By championing policies that integrate human needs with biodiversity conservation, we can position sustainable use as a solution to global challenges like food security, equity, and sustainable development.

Moreover, CITES CoP20 offers an opportunity to elevate our vision on a global stage. As we advocate for scientifically sound decisions, we can demonstrate how sustainable use aligns with modern conservation principles and human rights. This approach not only supports biodiversity but also empowers communities, safeguards cultural heritage, and ensures the fair distribution of natural resources.

The road ahead will not be easy, but it is full of promise. If we seize this moment to deepen our cooperation, amplify our voices, and remain steadfast in our commitment to evidence-based conservation, the Sustainable Use Community can emerge stronger than ever. Let us embrace this outlook with confidence and a renewed sense of purpose. Together, we can turn the challenges of today into the successes of tomorrow.

Eugène Lapointe
IWMC President
Former Secretary-General of CITES (1982-1990)

Lausanne, 3rd December 2024