



Australians For Animals

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GIANT STRIDES FOR WHALES

This is a first hand report from our Co-ordinator who has just returned from a major lobbying effort in Washington DC. In her own words !

"The trip was amazing. With my dear friend Robin Mankey who is California Director of the California Gray Whale Coalition, we set out to cram as many meetings with Congress members and Senate staffers as we could manage.

It was incredible to realise it was just a little over a year ago when AFA created the historic three nation Gray Whale Coalition and now we were in Washington DC to lobby support for a budget resolution which would see a five year study of the Gray Whales undertaken.

To have got this far is the work of miracles. Getting a Joint Resolution through the California Assembly and Senate for the Gray Whales was also a miracle. Our trip marked the first time that Gray Whales have got the attention of the Congress and Senate since their delisting in 1994. Robin and I were pretty excited about our meetings and, as it turned out, we had every reason to be.

After a short consultation with staffers from the office of Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey, who was responsible for putting up the budget resolution, we started our long rounds of meetings.

In two days we walked nearly ten miles. Lobbying requires an Olympian effort. There are three Congressional buildings, linked by underground tunnels. To walk from one building to another is a long hike, specially as its very easy to get lost as you walk the long unidentified corridors. Then each office floor was approximately a kilometre in distance. If we mistakenly went to the wrong building, it meant at least a two km walk back to the right office.

By the end of two days, both of us had very sore feet but high hopes. At every office we lobbied, we were given good hearings, words of support and indications that the resolution would be favourably considered.

Then we had to turn out sights to the US Senate where we already had the support of Californian Democrat Senators, Barbara Boxer and Diane Feinstein as well as support from Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

We had been advised by staffers for the Congressional sub-committee we lobbied that we needed to get these California power house women to influence the Senate to agree to the same resolution.

Some of the Congressional offices were incredible. The office of Congressman Don Young, a Republican from Alaska, was enough to give any animal activist the horrors. A huge bear skin was staked out against one wall, together with stuffed heads of various creatures which had been shot and mounted for show.

Staffers were courteous and helpful. There's a definite sense



Image courtesy of James Dorsey

that change is in the air but so much damage to repair after 8 years of Bush.

We walked for miles up and down the long corridors day after day, sometimes sneaking a break sitting in the magnificent parks which surround the Congressional buildings. It is an awe inspiring experience to sit in the middle of DC and realise the extent of power and the depth of the insanity which has so characterised the US for the last decade.

WASHINGTON DC WHERE THINGS HAPPEN.

Witnessing the throngs that marched up and down the corridors of power lobbying on many issues was an incredible experience.

What is good about American democracy is the availability of Congress members to the voting public. Not the members themselves, but their staffers. When I think of the months it takes to get meetings with staffers in the Federal and State Parliaments here, it's clear the public access is highly restricted. Although it's easier to get to the electoral office, the power brokers are in the Parliaments.

By the end of the week, we felt a sense of optimism in DC, for the first time in years. Even the Republicans are talking about the need to protect the environment. But there's a long way to go and no guarantees that Pres. Obama is going to wave the miracle wand. Lobbying in DC is not for amateurs.

If you're not an expert on your issue, you won't get far. There's absolutely no substitute for the personal meetings we made, they create a bond and ensure ongoing relationships.

Besides the Gray Whale resolution, AFA has two major campaign strategies underway focussed on Japan's whaling and the commercial whaling which Iceland and Norway are currently engaged in. Holding meetings with key people in DC was critical as they are the only ones, because of their positions, that can make things happen.

Because of the need for some secrecy, I'm not going to be able to report on these campaigns until they're in the works. But suffice to say that I had indications of 99%

support for funding for these two initiatives which will have global ramifications for whales and the current nightmare going on in IWC.

AFA has engaged some of the best international lawyers in these initiatives. Over the years I've built up some amazing connections on behalf of AFA within the DC environmental and legal communities. The charity receives unprecedented support from a variety of extremely influential people and organizations in DC.

We won't know the outcome of the Gray Whale budget resolution for some weeks. But it's in the works, and we've been advised that if it gets through the first stage, it's a winner.



It is the best hope for the Gray Whale. If we succeed, the corks will be popping. If we do not succeed with this resolution, then AFA will take the long road to a relisting under the Endangered Species Act and we'll renew our political efforts next year.

Truly, the fate of the Gray Whales is now in the lap of the Gods.

MIXING IT WITH THE HEAVIES

We were invited to a reception which IFAW put on in the Capitol Hill Visitor Center.

The reception, which was co-hosted by Hollywood actor Pierce Brosnan and his wife Keeley, was focussed on educating congress members, senators and staffers on whaling issues.

Any normal human being would have been very excited to go to a reception in the brand new Visitor Center which is located right in the heart of government, in spitting distance of the Capitol and all the historic Congress and Senate Buildings.

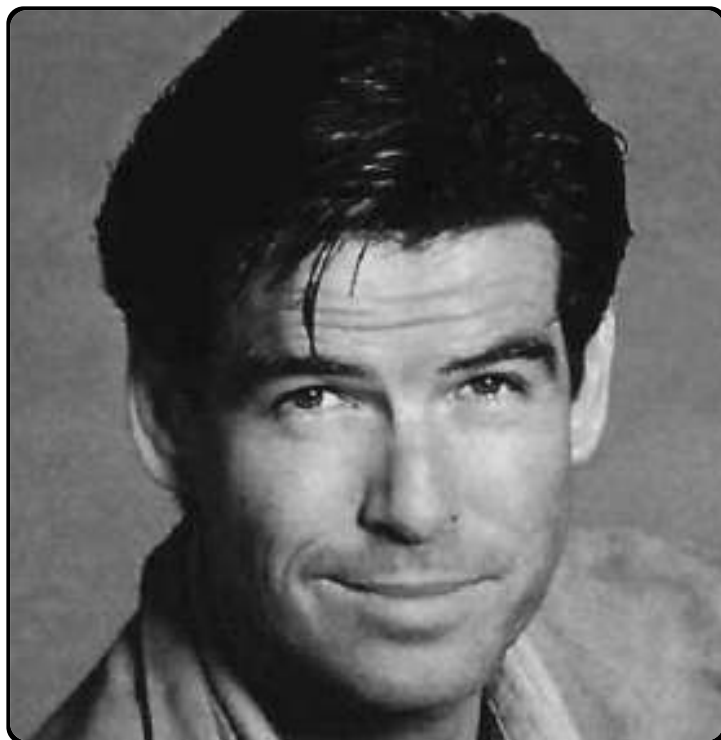
Robin and I knew we had to go because I particularly wanted to thank Pierce Brosnan for supporting the California Gray Whale Coalition (he's on the website:-www.californiagraywhalecoalition.org). We were also curious about whether receptions make a difference in US policy.

BUT, we had very sore feet and the reception was at the end of another long day of lobbying and we knew there was no way to get to the Visitors Center without more walking!

Security issues equate with paranoia in DC, particularly around the Government buildings. We were instructed that we could only bring purses which did not exceed a specific size to the reception. Otherwise we would be refused entry by security. So down to the nearest shopping mall to buy a totally unnecessary purse so we could get permission to enter!

It was a beautiful Washington evening when we arrived. Standing in the centre of government of the most powerful nation on earth under a full moon is a heady experience. The tangible energy of the buildings, the grandeur of the architecture, magnificent parks with trees in full bloom, the number of police, everything is about power.

We managed to get through security with our new small purses! At the reception, I was, miraculously, able to meet Pierce Brosnan and to thank him personally for his support for the



Gray Whales and for everything he and his wife do for whales. This guy is a real activist and makes his name and money count for the whales.

Of course once the conversation was over, both Robin and I kicked ourselves for not having taken a photo on our mobile phones, not even giving him a card! But we did manage to have a great conversation with him and to know that he uses his fame in such a compassionate way.

There were many luminaries at the event, and many speeches. But the next day's agenda made it impossible for us to stay for the whole program. The reception, no doubt a good idea in DC, was in many ways no different to a corporation selling its product. Animal welfare groups and receptions are a strange combination but in the current political and economic scenarios, whatever works!

A Dismal Turn-Out

It's been a few years since I lobbied in DC. Last time was when the Revised Management Scheme looked like it was going to happen.

No major US groups were actively opposing the Scheme, which would have resulted in a resumption of commercial whaling, so there was no lobbying in the Congress that alerted Congress members to the fact that it should be opposed at all costs.

Although at the time it seemed incredible an Aussie group had to do the lobbying. But we do what we have to do.

Not a whole lot has changed whale-wise in DC. Nothing could illustrate this stuck state more than the Congressional sub-committee hearing on the US position at the forthcoming IWC meeting. Three witnesses gave evidence before the sub-Committee Chairperson

including Dr. William Hogarth, Bush appointed US IWC Delegation leader and current Chair of the IWC.

As luck would have it, we happened to be in DC at the time of the Hearing.

A long standing DC environmental activist advised me to make sure I got to the Hearing room at least one and a half hours before it opened as there would be a long queue of activists waiting to get in. According to him, sometimes there were so many people wanting to hear the proceedings that another meeting room with TV facilities would be set up.

As well, this meeting was

particularly important as thus far, there had been no major indications of where Pres. Obama stands on the whale conservation issue or whether he would reverse the damage created by Pres. Bush. The refusal of Bush to impose trade sanctions against Japan and now Iceland and Norway have so weakened the IWC that the convention is nothing more than a yearly talk fest guaranteed to turn any reasonable person into a life long manic depressive.

So armed with the advice to turn up early, together with our California Director, Robin Mankey, we duly rocked up at the Hearing room one hour before only to find no one there. We waited for 30 minutes for the doors to open and by the time the hearing started, the audience numbered no more than 40 people who came in dribs and drabs. No queues, no waiting to get in to the meeting room.

Many of the audience were staffers for various congress members. The number of whale conservation groups present dismally small, lots of empty chairs.

Given that Dr Hogarth was going to be grilled by the Committee Chair, and given the huge damage Hogarth has wreaked on the IWC and whales generally, I automatically assumed this meeting was really critical. Just a few weeks short of the annual IWC meeting, conservation groups wanted to know whether Pres. Obama would remove Hogarth from his position at the very least, or force a change in US whale conservation policy.

No small potatoes.

It was depressing to realise how far down the political agenda whales have slid. Not just the political agenda but whales are also off the agenda of many major conservation groups.

THE IWC MEETING IN PORTUGAL

AFA Committee made the decision to not waste precious funds on sending Sue to the IWC meeting in Madiera, Portugal. Why these meetings have to be held in such inaccessible places is beyond comprehension.

Madiera is an island off the coast of Portugal, requiring expensive flights and never-ending jet lag incurred with the distance from Australia.

Apart from the physical endurance effort, the meeting is currently descending into the same old never-ending fight over Japan's efforts to increase its whaling by demanding coastal whaling in return for dropping 29 whales from its obscene "scientific quota."

ABC TV had former Federal Minister Ian Campbell on air pointing out that Japan is breaking international law. He's dead right. Many international conventions are being broken by Japan whilst the rest of the world ignores these violations. Ditto for Iceland and Norway.

AFA is almost alone in its continuing campaign focus on international legal action. The only way to deal with Japan, and now Norway and Iceland is to take these countries to the international courts. There are a multiplicity of legal actions available, including mediation. In the US, hopes have

been pinned on Pres. Obama but so far, Hogarth is still leading the US delegation; the latest from the IWC meeting in Portugal is that the US delegation is pushing for support for Greenland to kill Humpback whales. The signs are not good.

Our current Minister for the Environment, Peter Garrett, like Pres. Obama, likes to make great speeches but in Garrett's case - no action. He continues to ignore the very concerning violations by Japan and to take part in a government that has put on hold any legal action. Australia is the only country which has made an election promise to its people to take Japan to the international courts.

The elephant in the room is trade. No one wants to deal with this issue. Japan is Australia's number one trading partner and that's the bottom line in this miserable fight. The US is terrified that any sanctions against Japan will result in Japan putting sanctions on the American beef industry.

AFA is the only IWC NGO focussed on the trade issue. As



far as the rest of the whale movement is concerned, we might as well have leprosy. No group wants to deal with the growing commercial trade in whale meat and products, yet this is at the heart of the chaos.

In Washington DC, I met with three internationally recognised trade legal experts on the whaling issue.

It's pretty clear that there are major violations of the WTO (World Trade Organisation - the

convention controlling globalisation) by Japan, Norway and Iceland. Japan taking the lead in all efforts to resume commercial whaling.

Any legal action requires a government to mount the challenge in the relevant international court or tribunal. But unless there is a huge public outcry and protest, no government is going to raise the issue.

For there to be a public protest, people have to be educated and understand what's really going on.

With the dumbing down by the media and governed by the appalling politicians (local, state, federal of all persuasions) who should hang their heads in shame, most Australians are starved for legitimate and critical information about where this country is heading. Let alone the appalling fate for all whales.

It's a tough fight. Forcing governments to take the steps necessary requires a major effort on the part of many. Unfortunately, most of the major whale conservation groups keep the parameters of their anti whaling campaigns narrowly focused. Listening to an IWC meeting these days is like watching a re-run of the movie Ground Hog Day.

But AFA is working tirelessly behind the scenes and hopefully, we'll have some good news on the whaling front soon.

ANOTHER HOLLYWOOD STAR SUPPORTS GRAY WHALES.

Ed Begley Jr. has graciously agreed to support the California Gray Whale Coalition.

He can currently be seen in the hit Seth Rogan/Judd Apatow film, "Pineapple Express", as well as many Christopher Guest films, including "A Mighty Wind", "Best In Show," and "For Your Consideration".

Other feature film credits include "Batman Forever", "The Accidental Tourist" and "The In-Laws."

On television, Begley is appearing in the new US CBS comedy called "Gary Unmarried" He has also been seen recently in "Recount" with Kevin Spacey, Tom Wilkinson and Laura Dern, as well as recurring roles on "Six



Ed Begley Jr.

"Feet Under", "Arrested Development", and "Boston Legal."

Ed is a great environmentalist and the Coalition is really happy to have him on board.

CALIFORNIA GRAY WHALE COALITION.

The Coalition is now huge, with more and more groups joining as word gets around of the Coalition's efforts to gain permanent legal protection for the Gray Whales.

In DC, we were able to provide a long and impressive list of organizations, both conservation based and economic, who supported the budget resolution.

Whilst we wait for the outcome of this resolution, the Coalition is seeking the deepest possible involvement of the tourism industry in California. With so much information, research and material on the Gray Whale, AFA is considering a book

which tells the story of our 12 year effort to protect this majestic and special whale.

Meantime, behind the scenes, the Makah tribe continue their attempt to secure the right to begin killing a yearly quota of the Gray Whales. We can only hope that there is some sense in DC these days which ensures that climate change impacts trump any efforts by any group to kill whales.

Check out the website which has been re-designed.

www.californiagraywhalecoalition.org

Back home Disaster after disaster.

Coming back to the Far North Coast was a big shock. Massive storms and floods have destroyed most of the beaches and shoreline.

Many of the beaches are completely inaccessible as there's now 15-20 foot high sand cliffs, and no paths down to what's left of the beaches. The beaches themselves are covered in branches, stones, rubbish and trees which have fallen down.

It's really hard to calculate how extensive the damage is but there will be a major impact on the tourism industry for a long time to come.

Then came the news that the Rees Government in NSW was planning to support the Shooters Party Bill which would allow shooting of native animals and birds in the state's national parks! Apparently the Bill has been shelved until September because of the public outcry. But its by no means off the political agenda.

It's hard to believe that in this time of climate change, dramatically highlighted by the massive beach erosion on the Far North Coast, that any responsible government would allow shooting in National Parks.

In NSW, National Parks have suffered for years from massive

under-funding, under-management and a lack of rangers.

If this dreadful Bill does go through, National Parks will become dangerous places to visit and native animals and birds will no longer have refuge anywhere. If you feel strongly about this issue, and AFA hopes you do – please write a letter of protest to Premier Rees, Parliament House, Macquarie Street, Sydney, 2000. All letters will help, this Bill needs to be consigned to the garbage bin permanently.

According to the media, the NSW Labour Party is doing a deal with the Shooters Party to remain in power. Part of the deal is to allow the Bill to go through.

AFA is weary and disgusted by the ongoing sacrifice of our precious wildlife on the altar of power and money by politicians.

Australians are being increasingly denied the democratic process in our governments.

RALLY FROM HELL

The next bad news is that the NSW Parliament, with the support of both major parties, has voted in favour of legislation which will allow Rally Australia to hold a massive international rally in Kyogle and Tweed Shires, bringing hundreds of rally drivers and thousands of speed fanatics to the region.

So great was community protest that the awful Rees government made the decision to deny the public any legal rights and to pass legislation in the Parliament that would allow the rally to be conducted every year for the next ten years. The rally legislation specifically states that the event will down all relevant Acts, including the National Parks & Wildlife Act, Threatened Species Act, Planning Acts, anything and every bit of legislation that might interfere with Rally Australia's "right" to turn this prestigious environmental region into a scene from Hell.

The rally will be held around the World Heritage Rainforests of Mt Warning. In areas where Koalas and other threatened and endangered wildlife are struggling to survive. Koalas are being wiped out by a retrovirus,

traffic, dogs, habitat loss and lack of adequate legal protection. Every remaining North Coast Koala is precious and vitally important to the survival of the species.

It's an incredible act by the NSW Parliament to over-ride the democratic process on behalf of a developer whose only benefit from running these speed fests is the money to be made.

To suggest that the event will be beneficial to the region is a distortion of the balance sheet which ignores the damage to the environment; to wildlife; to communities; to the peace and quiet of the region. The way business is done in Sydney these days is more akin to some corrupt African regime. Money talks, the people are irrelevant.

The trouble is who do we vote for? With the Coalition in NSW voting in favour of the rally, the choices are very limited.

LEFTY LION

For those of you who loved the incredible saga of Lefty, the elderly Burmese cat who went missing for three months and survived, he is in fine shape.



Lefty is now back to his normal weight and has slowed down to two meals a day from his previous 8-10 meals!

But he loves to live outside and often sits under a tree when it rains rather than curl up in front of a heater.

From his weird behaviour from time to time, we think cockroaches were a major part of his diet. He also became very

distrustful of humans so who knows what went on in those three months.

There's been no sign of any long term health impacts. Lefty is with his human, Luke, and the amazing part of this tale is that Luke and his partner Becky, live on 5 acres which are un-fenced.

There's no barriers anywhere but Lefty never leaves home!

GRATITUDE FOR ALL THE SUPPORT.

As always, AFA is deeply grateful for the support the charity receives from its donors, the lawyers and research scientists who generously give of their time and for the miracles that happen on a regular basis.

The creatures of the Earth are in deep trouble as our world undergoes changes which have ramifications we cannot even imagine at this time.

So many domestic animals abandoned by their owners who can no longer afford to keep them. Wildlife pushed out of their shrinking habitats

with no place to go. Irreplaceable ecosystems bulldozed into building sites, the list goes on to infinity.

But we can make a difference and we must try to make a difference.

***For the Animals,
Sue Arnold & Friends.***