



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Tokelau Declares Newest Pacific Whale Sanctuary, Highlights Global Momentum for Whale Conservation**

#### **Announcement Bolsters Efforts to Safeguard Southern Ocean Sanctuary and Enforce Whaling Moratorium at International Whaling Commission**

**AUCKLAND (April 14, 2010)** —Tokelau, a territory in the South Pacific, declared its waters to be a whale sanctuary today, the eleventh such designation in the Pacific. The announcement took place at the start of a symposium marking the South Pacific Whale Research Consortium's tenth anniversary.

"Tokelau's decision to declare its exclusive economic zone a sanctuary for whales is based on our firm belief that we share a common responsibility in the Pacific for the protection of these species. Whales don't recognize national boundaries and Tokelau would be remiss if we failed to support our Pacific island neighbours in the quest to help recovery of the whales in our region," said Honourable Aliko Faipule Foua Toloa of Tokelau.

Despite a global moratorium on commercial whaling since 1986 and the establishment of the Southern Ocean as an international whale sanctuary in 1994, more than 1,500 whales are hunted and killed each year for their meat. Hundreds of thousands of whales and dolphins are also killed or harmed by ship strikes, entanglement in fishing gear, and pollution; many species also face threats from the impacts of climate change.

To address these challenges and identify new ways forward for strengthening whale conservation in the Pacific, experts from around the region and the world are gathered in Auckland from April 13 to 17. The conference has been organized by the South Pacific Whale Research Consortium (SPWRC) together with the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), the Pew Environment Group and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW).

Tokelau's announced whale sanctuary will outlaw whaling throughout its 290,000 square kilometer Exclusive Economic Zone. Eleven Pacific nations and territories have now created sanctuaries protecting whales within their waters. These safe havens for Pacific whales are critical as many migrate south each year through national sanctuaries to the internationally

recognized Southern Ocean whale sanctuary, which is located in the waters around Antarctica and is the summer feeding ground for whales.

“The whale holds special cultural and spiritual significance in our islands and, in a sense, reminds us of our beginnings as migratory peoples. We believe that by working together and supporting sanctuaries, we will not only be giving whales a chance, but also potentially improving our ability to manage other ocean resources on which we depend for our livelihoods,” said Honourable Aliko Faipule Foua Toloa.

Since the International Whaling Commission’s (IWC) global moratorium on commercial whaling came into force in 1986, more than 30,000 whales have been killed by the few remaining whaling countries, including endangered and vulnerable species such as fin and sei whales. Japan, Iceland and Norway currently hunt whales through loopholes in the IWC’s rules. Only Japan continues to hunt whales in the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary.

An advisory committee to the "Small Working Group on the Future of the IWC" is currently meeting in Washington, D.C., to negotiate a proposed way forward for the IWC to reduce the number of whales killed and end commercial hunting of whales that continues despite the moratorium.

“We welcome Tokelau’s announcement in support of whale conservation today,” said Karen Sack, director of international ocean conservation for the Pew Environment Group. “There is a stark contrast between the growing number of countries declaring their commitment to whale conservation by establishing sanctuaries, and the negotiations on the future of the IWC. This international organization should reinforce its own whale safe havens on the high seas, particularly in the Southern Ocean, to complement and enhance country protections.”

“By declaring sanctuaries, Pacific Island states, like Tokelau, have clearly given their wish to see the global conflict over whales resolved so that these magnificent creatures can continue to be watched and enjoyed by future generations, and can fulfill their vital roles in the ocean ecosystems,” said Lui Bell, marine species officer for SPREP.

“This is the United Nations’ International Year of Biodiversity, which is meant to reverse the decline and loss of species and habitats around the globe. From this important gathering in Auckland, we call on the member governments of the IWC who are meeting this week in Washington, DC to listen to the peoples of the Pacific, and take decisions that will truly benefit marine biodiversity conservation,” said Patrick Ramage, global whale program director for IFAW.

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**BACKGROUND:** The eleven Pacific nations and territories that have created whale sanctuaries within their waters are: Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Niue, Papa New Guinea, Samoa, American Samoa, Tokelau and Vanuatu.

The South Pacific Whale Research Consortium (SPWRC) was formed by independent scientists to investigate the status of humpback and other whale species in the region of Oceania, including New Zealand and eastern Australia. Members have been involved in field studies

initiated as early as 1991 in New Caledonia, the Kingdom of Tonga, the Cook Islands and French Polynesia, as well as eastern Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific coast of South America, the Ross Sea and the Antarctic Peninsula. The consortium meets annually to compare and review data collected during each winter season, including individual identification photographs, genetic samples, sighting records and song recordings. <http://www.whaleresearch.org/spwrc.htm>

Media interviews available

More information about the Pew Environment Group's whale conservation efforts can be found here: <http://www.pewwhales.org/>