

Correspondence

Whaling convention is the best we've got

Peter Bridgewater *et al.* call for the International Whaling Commission (IWC) to be dismantled because it has “so little to show” since the moratorium on commercial whaling began in 1985 (P. Bridgewater *et al. Nature* **632**, 500–502; 2024). I have attended numerous IWC meetings as both a governmental delegate and an observer. The authors are wrong.

Indigenous and commercial whaling occurs on shared populations, and is best overseen by an international body. The IWC's scientific committee is “without rival” in supporting decisions on whale management (N. Gales *Mar. Policy* **141**, 105089; 2022). Its conservation committee has developed management plans for vulnerable cetacean species and a workstream for mitigating threats.

The authors also misunderstand other treaties. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) does not apply to most whale hunts because no international trade occurs. Neither CITES nor the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), to which I have served as a legal adviser, has competence to regulate whale harvest. Not all whaling countries are party to the CMS and it does not cover all whaling grounds. With a remit covering more than 1,000 migratory species, the CMS is ill-suited to be a “global whale observatory”.

The IWC remains essential to whale conservation. It needs full cooperation and adequate funding, not dismantling.

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Montreal Protocol is no ‘zombie’ deal

Using the example of the 1946 International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling, Peter Bridgewater and his colleagues argue for ending “zombie” environmental-protection conventions (P. Bridgewater *et al. Nature* **632**, 500–502; 2024). They name the 1987 Montreal Protocol on ozone-depleting substances, arguing that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) could assume its “residual tasks”.

The Montreal Protocol is mandatory, and in its lifetime has phased out nearly 100 harmful chemicals, putting the stratospheric ozone layer on a path to full recovery by 2066. By boosting protection against ultraviolet light, it will prevent some two million skin cancer deaths per year by 2030. It is on course to avert 2.5°C of warming by 2100, by reducing atmospheric levels of fluorinated gases and guarding forest carbon sinks from UV (P. J. Young *et al. Nature* **596**, 384–388; 2021). By contrast, global greenhouse-gas emissions continue to rise under voluntary UNFCCC agreements.

Parties to the protocol are discussing measures such as narrowing exemptions for chemical feedstocks and phasing down emissions of nitrous oxide. Best to let them continue, and for the UNFCCC to encourage agreements in other areas – such as a mandatory deal on reducing methane emissions in the fossil-fuel sector.

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Mandate data access for social-media researchers

Despite calls for social-media platforms to increase transparency (see, for example, C. Budak *et al. Nature* **630**, 45–53; 2024), researchers now have few tools to understand the potential harms of the online world. On 14 August, Meta shut down CrowdTangle, a tool that gave researchers and journalists easy access to data from Facebook and Instagram. Early last year, X, then known as Twitter, removed free access to its application programming interface, which allowed researchers to collect data.

Regulations must be put in place to require platforms to provide such access. The 2022 European Union Digital Services Act already mandates it for researchers studying systemic risks to the EU. This legislation could serve as a model for the United States and elsewhere.

Most people support greater transparency from social-media platforms (S. Rathje *et al. Perspect. Psychol. Sci.* <https://doi.org/ndqj>; 2023), suggesting that laws mandating it would have wide support.

Countries around the world are considering policies to mitigate the harms of social media, yet it is difficult to create effective policies if these harms are poorly understood. Data access for independent researchers will help us to assess the risks of online platforms and inform evidence-based policymaking.

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Conserve genetic diversity to conserve biodiversity

Genetic diversity is essential to biodiversity. When environmental conditions change, as with global warming, genetic modifications under natural selection help to prevent populations and species, especially of sessile organisms such as plants, from extirpation. Governments and conservation authorities worldwide must do more to set aside areas where natural selection can occur without human intervention.

Of more than 300,000 protected areas listed by the authoritative Protected Planet database, only three are officially designated as genetic reserves. Even taking into account other spaces that let the processes of natural selection occur freely, such as strictly protected nature reserves and forest tree genetic conservation units in Europe, less than 10% of all protected areas have preserving genetic diversity as a conservation goal.

Conserving genetic diversity requires differential reproduction and survival rates among individuals. This can strongly conflict with management objectives aimed at increasing production, recreation or aesthetic services, and implies shifting our view of nature and biodiversity from a service to people to broader perspectives (U. Pascual *et al. Nature* **620**, 813–823; 2023), including ones in which nature has an intrinsic right to exist.

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