

Whaling in the 21st Century

In defiance of an international ban on commercial whaling, and against the spirit of the moratorium, Japan, Norway and Iceland continue to kill hundreds of whales each year

Japan sets an annual quota allowing whalers to kill more than a thousand animals each year in two hunts conducted under the guise of 'scientific whaling'.

North Pacific hunt (JARPN):

10 sperm whales
100 sei whales
50 Bryde's whales
220 minke whales

In 2007, Japan killed 207 minkes, 100 sei whales, 50 Bryde's whales and 3 sperm whales in the North Pacific.

Antarctic hunt (JARPA II):

850 minke whales (+/- 10%)
50 fin whales
50 humpback whales (this species was added to the list in 2007, but the hunting of humpbacks was postponed).

The final death toll from the 2007/2008 Antarctic hunt was 551 minkes. No fin whales were taken.

Japan also kills tens of thousands of small whales and dolphins each year for its domestic market in hunts that are not regulated by the IWC. Demand for whale meat in Japan continues to fall, with few Japanese people choosing to eat whale meat.

Norway resumed commercial whaling in 1994 and today carries out the world's largest commercial whale hunt through a legal 'Objection' lodged against the ban on commercial whaling in 1982. The objection serves to exempt Norway from the ban.

For the last three years Norway has allocated itself massive quotas of 1,052 minke whales annually. However, over the last decade Norway has only met its quota once, which was in 2001 when the quota was set at 546 animals. There is no evidence to suggest that there is a strong domestic market for the 1,052 minke whales permitted in Norway's hunt, but Norway hopes to overturn the ban on international trade in whale meat and resume exports.

In 2007, Norway killed 592 minke whales.

Iceland stopped commercial whaling in 1986 when the commercial whaling moratorium came into effect. In 1992 Iceland left the IWC and subsequently re-joined in 2002 with a legally disputed reservation against the moratorium.

Between 2003 and 2007 Iceland killed a total of 200 minke whales for 'scientific research'. In 2006 Iceland resumed commercial whaling with a quota for 30 minke whales and 9 of the much larger fin whale. Seven fin whales and seven minke whales were killed in commercial hunts in the 2006/2007 season.

The market for whale meat in Iceland is very poor. In August 2007 the Icelandic Fisheries Minister announced he would not be issuing whaling quotas, as there was no market demand for Icelandic whale products. Despite this, in 2008 the Fisheries Minister announced a commercial whaling quota for 40 minke whales and hunting began in May.

Greenland's whaling quotas are allocated by the IWC under the category of Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling which allows certain indigenous peoples to hunt otherwise protected whales to satisfy longstanding cultural and subsistence needs.

At this year's IWC meeting, Denmark will propose a new quota for the hunting of humpback whales by Greenland. If successful, humpback whales will be killed by Greenlandic whalers for first time since the commercial whaling ban came into force in 1986.

Greenland currently has a quota for 212 minke, 19 fin whales and 2 bowheads. However, Greenland's whalers argue that a further quota of humpback whales is needed, despite not taking their existing quota, a large proportion of the meat being sold for commercial purposes, and the whalers appearing to profit from selling by products such as carved bones to tourists as souvenirs.

Greenland also conducts large and unregulated annual hunts of thousands of small cetaceans annually (orcas, narwhal, beluga whales, harbour porpoise and pilot whales) which 'top up' their whale hunts.

International Trade

Norway, Japan and Iceland all hold reservations exempting them from the ban on international commercial trade in whales imposed by CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

In late May 2008, Iceland used its reservation to export 60 tonnes of fin whale meat to Japan, and Norway, apparently in the same shipment, sent five tonnes of minke whale meat. WDCS believes that this export defies the spirit of the CITES trade ban and makes a mockery of efforts to negotiate a settlement with the whaling nations. It proves that they cannot be trusted.

Whaling is inherently cruel

Due to the inherent difficulties under which whaling takes place, which involves aiming weapons at a moving target on a moving sea from a moving platform, WDCS believes that whaling can never be guaranteed to be humane and that commercial whaling should cease on welfare grounds alone.

Whales that are killed for commercial purposes should be afforded the same level of legislative welfare protection as other animals that are killed for commercial purposes. However, this is not the case and WDCS argues that it is not possible to ensure a humane death for hunted whales, since they can not be humanely secured and stunned before slaughter, or guaranteed an instantaneous death.

Whales that are struck and wounded by a projectile during hunting (usually a harpoon or bullet) are known as 'Struck and Lost'. 'Stuck and Lost' whales are an unacceptable aspect of all whale and dolphin hunts. These animals may not be killed outright by the initial strike, and will have an unknown fate, possibly suffering for many days.

The IWC

The International Whaling Commission (IWC) was formed to regulate the out of control whaling industry. At first essentially a whalers club, the IWC's first decades oversaw the decimation of species after species.

In 1986 the IWC implemented a ban on commercial whaling. By the time the ban came into effect, many of the world's whale populations had been pushed to the brink of extinction by years over over-exploitation by whalers.

Today the IWC maintains the moratorium on commercial whaling but is under increasing pressure from whaling nations.

For more information, or images, please contact the WDCS Press Office on 01249 449 534, 07834 498 277 or email press@wdcs.org

WDCS will have representatives at the IWC 60 meeting, and will be happy to answer questions or provide information, statements or quotes before, during and following the meeting.