

The International Harpoon

- The Paper with a Point -

Reasserting Control Over ... What?

“The 1946 International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling is anachronistic. It’s name alone suggests that.” Thus spoke a wise

man, New Zealand commissioner Jim McClay, back in 1996. And his words of wisdom are even truer today.

McClay, who was addressing a Consultative Seminar for NGOs, Industry, Political Parties and Media, was commenting on the lamentable state of regulation of the world’s whaling in the 1990s. His point (and it was well made) was that so little of the world’s whaling was being regulated by the ICRW or any other international convention, that the IWC served virtually no purpose any more.

research whaling, and sets its own sample size.

So that’s some 1,100 minke whales being caught annually outside the IWC’s control, which means it now manages 25.6% of the world’s whale harvest.

That’s not so good. But there’s worse.

Now let’s look at catches of whale species managed by the IWC, but which it does not know about. Among IWC members we can find just

one country that may possibly fall into this category, the US. Documentation of these catches in the US is, to say the least, sparse, but we have incredibly unreliable sources who absolutely insist that one or two minkes are taken from time to time, and perhaps 10 grays a year.

And we add to them whales being taken by countries which are not IWC members. For the sake of argument, let’s allocate one

bowhead to Canada. The 35 sperm whales caught in 1997 in Indonesia are documented. Then we have estimates of 20 Bryde’s whales in Indonesia, and maybe another five Bryde’s whales in the Philippines. In addition to these, there are directed catches of large whales in at least two other countries that we know of, but for political reasons we cannot mention them here.

And our trusty calculator now reveals that the IWC is managing some ... 24.4% of the world’s whaling.

Hmm, that was hardly worth calculating. How about we include all those whales and small cetaceans that don’t come under the IWC’s control? After all, Baird’s beaked whales are as big

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Taking our lead from McClay, the *Harpoon* decided to do a survey to see just how relevant the ICRW is as a regulatory tool.

And we begin with the whaling that the IWC actually regulates. As far as we can see, this is confined to the setting or sanctioning of “aboriginal subsistence” quotas in a total of four countries: Greenland, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Russia and the US. Thus, the total number of whales being caught each year under the IWC’s control is about 380, made up of minkes, fins, humpbacks, grays, and bowheads.

So far so good.

Then, of course, there are those catches by Japan and Norway, which everyone is getting so excited about. In case you are the one person in Oman who doesn’t already know this, both countries are IWC members and are whaling in compliance with the ICRW, but the IWC has no control over them. Norway is whaling under objection and sets its own quotas, while Japan is conducting



A sperm whaler expresses his joy at learning Indonesia is not a member of the IWC.

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as minke, and we're always being told that dolphins are "whales" too.

Now, we're still sticking to directed catches, and just in those countries for which the *Harpoon* has reliable information, namely the Faroe Islands, Japan, Greenland, Canada, Indonesia, Caribbean island nations, the Philippines, the US and Russia. By conservative estimates, these countries combine to catch 2,000 pilot whales; 70 Baird's beaked whales; 2,100 porpoises of various species; and 1,900 belugas and narwhals. Not even including directed takes in South Asia for which we have no reliable figures, that makes 6,070 more cetaceans being caught outside of the IWC's control.

Out with the calculator again, and now we should see something. Yep, the IWC now controls a staggering ... 4.9% of the world's whaling.

And we still haven't included the dolphins!

So as Jim McClay says, the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling clearly is an anachronism.

Sorry? A misunderstanding? You didn't mean that the *convention* was an anachronism? You meant that *whaling* was an anachronism?!

Take a look at the figures. You might want to change your mind.

Ghost Ships Off the Azores?

Or Just "Rainbow Warrior" Hanging Around?

What does the sighting of a buoy and a whale prove? Pirate whaling, of course.

It proves that a whale has been killed by a catcher boat, and that the whale is now attached to the buoy, waiting for a factory ship to pick it up and process it for the lucrative Japanese market.

Is that too hasty a conclusion? Not if you are the «highly respected» Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS), who received reports of dead whales, buoys, and a whale that «appeared to be attached to the buoy» from yachts west of the Azores. On June 11 last year, two British newspapers, the *Guardian* and the *Independent*, ran the story that pirate whaling was once again being conducted.

«So far 12 whales have been reported killed or harpooned and fastened alive to buoys for collection by factory ships about 200 miles west of the Azores,» wrote the *Guardian*. And the WDCS told the paper that «a group of pirates (is) killing whales in the Atlantic for the lucrative Japanese market.»

The *Independent*, meanwhile, reported that evidence «suggests a pirate whaling operation is underway,» and the highly respected WDCS concluded that

this must be the result of «a large, well planned pirate-whaling operation.»

Lack of critical journalism

Both papers agreed, therefore, that pirate whaling was being conducted, but the evidence on which this conclusion was based was flimsy, to say the least. Typical phrases used to describe the evidence were «appeared to», «there have been reports», «been hearing reports», «unusual and very large buoys», etc. The lack of hard facts is outrageous.

Brad Delange, captain of the yacht *Globana*, for instance, reported that he «saw a large pod of whales near the surface. In the middle of the pod there was a yellow floating buoy. When we approached the whales they all submerged, except the one near the buoy. It appeared to be attached to the buoy.» Was it attached to the buoy, or wasn't it? And if Delange wasn't sure, why didn't he check it out? After all, what is so remarkable about a pod of whales and a buoy in the ocean?

«12 whales have been reported killed or harpooned and fastened alive to buoys,» wrote Paul Brown of the *Guardian*. Is that killed but alive, or harpooned but alive?

WDCS comprehensive report

After feeding the media this

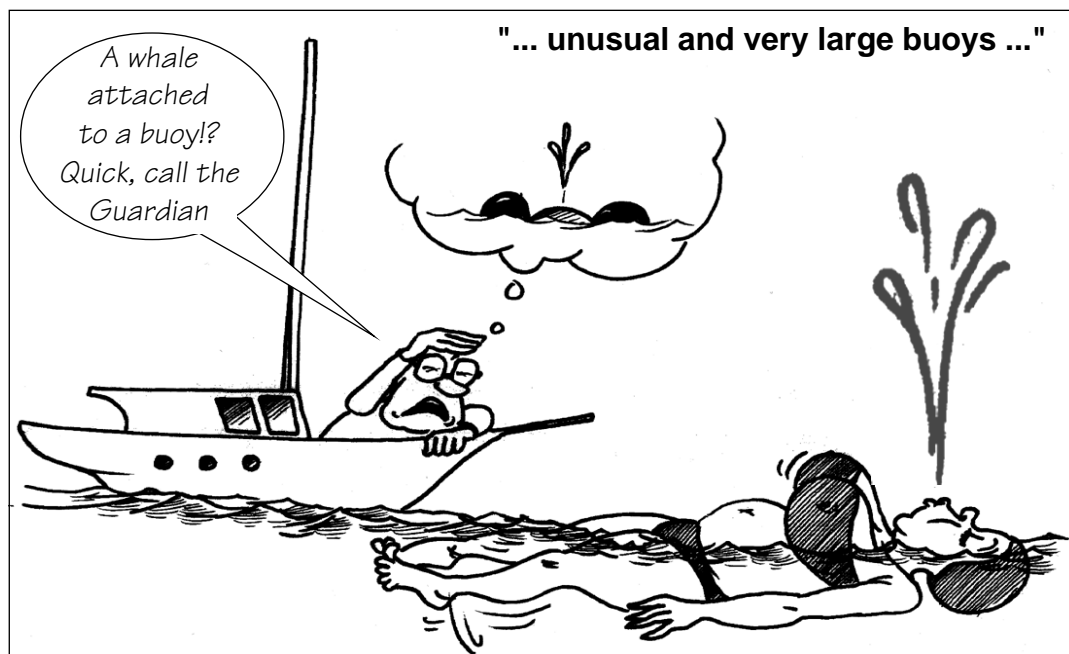
gossip in time for last year's meeting of CITES, the WDCS set out to prepare a comprehensive report entitled «An incident of suspected "pirate whaling" in the mid-Atlantic in 1997 and consideration of its implications for any future commercial whaling operations». This report was timed for last October's meeting of the IWC, and was prepared by Henry Palmer of the WDCS and Mark Simmonds, on this occasion credited as coming from the University of Greenwich. Simmonds is normally associated with the WDCS, as he is here in Oman.

The report has been nicely prepared, with observations in chronological order, a discussion of the data, a conclusion, and a list of «implications for any future commercial whaling operations.»

The WDCS tried to submit the report to the IWC in Monaco, but since it was of the same calibre as the articles in the *Guardian* and the *Independent*, it was rejected. Subsequently, the WDCS has been unwilling to talk about the incident, and has refused to share the report with others.

Here are some of the alarming observations made in the report:

- "Mr Herbert had heard reports of whale bodies being found out to sea (some attached to buoys) and vessels operating in a suspicious manner."
- "Mr Herb Hilgenberg ... had received reports of whale carcasses"
- "It may be that although these whales were alive, they were injured."
- "Delange ... believed that the whale was attached to the buoy and that the behaviour of the other whales might be interpreted as coming to the aid of their injured pod member."
- "[T]he skipper of the *True Love* reported that he saw a buoy, about 3 metres high, with a radar reflector attached and, under it, the body of a whale (white with black stripes — perhaps indicating it was floating upside down).»
- "The *SY Arche* encountered a submerged whale attached to a buoy with a radar reflector."



Could all this be true? No, says the WDCS! «It is acknowledged that radio traffic has contributed to exaggeration and embellishment of the activities off the Azores in May 1997.»

«It is now apparent that at least one report became confused in the radio traffic. The *Highland Fling* was originally reported as having hit a “harpooned” whale ... [A] crew member ... could only confirm that they had struck a dead whale.»

WDCS's conclusion

So what exactly was going on? What explanation can be offered for the observation and the buoys?

Says the report: «The buoys caused interest because they were unusually large and several had radar reflectors attached. Captain M.D. Cowpe (a charter skipper) provided a sketch of a buoy and Mr. Herbert forwarded a photograph of a fishing buoy that resembled the buoys associated with whales.»

That must mean that «the buoys associated with whales» also resemble fishing buoys, right? Not necessarily so, says the WDCS: «The buoys may have been used to mark and possibly support whale bodies.» «Certainly, there is no ready explanation for the presence of the buoys and the clear association reported between two of these buoys and apparently tethered whales seems, to say the least, unusual.»

Despite some exaggerations in the observations, WDCS concludes that «the nature and volume of the first hand reports strongly suggest some kind of whaling operation. (...) It has been widely suggested in the media that all these observations were consistent with one, or more, catcher boats operating in the region and leaving bodies behind for a factory boat to process later. The reports received would seem to support this.»

The implication of these revelations is that pelagic whaling should not be permitted because it is so difficult to monitor. Says the report: «Perhaps, what this incident illustrates most clearly is the difficulty involved in monitoring what is happening on the high seas. ... “Proving” obviously very difficult.»

Obviously!

Azores authorities conclusion

The regional authorities of the Azores were also interested in what had been going on, and assigned the task of finding out to the University of the Azores, whose representatives were given copies of reports from the yachts' logbooks concerning the suspicious observations, and empowered to question the captains of the vessels.

Helder Marques da Silva, director of the Azores regional fisheries directorate, told the *Harpoon* that when they contacted the vessels for confirmation of the observations, «the responses were not very precise,» and nobody could confirm that they had seen any whales attached to buoys.

«Our basic conclusion is that nothing illegal has taken place,» said da Silva. The most plausible explanation for the presence of the buoys, he said, was that they had just been used for ordinary fishing activities. But since WDCS is in the business of exposing pirate whaling, one cannot expect them to expose ordinary legal fishing.

«They die sooner or later,» was how he explained the possible sightings of dead whales.

Harpoon's conclusion

The *Harpoon* has also conducted some investigations, and our findings are no less alarming. We find that the WDCS has not been telling the whole truth.

The observation from *SY Tuesday Girl* on May 19, 1997, is one example of this. The WDCS report notes that the information received was: «Dead whale (noted as not being tagged)», the source was «Log book», and the WDCS's own comment was: «The yacht was passing through rough seas but recorded the body as about two miles away from its course.»

What was actually written in *Tuesday Girl's* logbook on this incident was: «More news from Herbs net was that Greenpeace's ship the *Rainbow Warrior* is out heading this way, we presume she is out to stop the whale hunt that is going on. We have heard reports of whale carcasses floating out here, some are tagged but one passed about 2 miles from us today with no marker — we hope Greenpeace sort the killers out!»

What if the skipper of *Tuesday Girl*, Jeff King, got it all wrong?

What if he just presumed that Greenpeace was there to stop the hunt? What if Greenpeace was actually whaling again? As we know, last summer another vessel from the Greenpeace fleet, the *Arctic Sunrise*, helped the Inupiat whalers of Alaska to take a bowhead (*Harpoon*, No 2, 1997).

Could the pirate whaler have been none other than the *Rainbow*

Warrior? Is this the real reason for Greenpeace's anti-whaling position in the IWC? Does Greenpeace just want to get the other whalers out of the business so they will have a monopoly on the hunt? We don't actually believe this, but we have to ask: what was the *Rainbow Warrior* doing there, and why did the WDCS not report its presence?

Editorial

Fooled Again

It seems as though the British media have a strong desire to constantly be fooled by horror stories from anti-whaling NGOs. The NGOs provide the journalists with the stuff for the stories, and all the journalists have to do is hold the microphone.

WDCS has absolutely no conclusive evidence that pirate whaling has gone on west of the Azores, but as they know as well as anyone, rumours can take on a life of their own.

So why couldn't they wait until they actually managed to get some conclusive evidence? There are at least three answers to that. Firstly, as things turned out, they wouldn't have got it anyway, because there was none. Secondly, the message was more important than the facts. And thirdly, the timing of the propaganda was crucial.

The newspaper articles appeared on June 11, i.e. at the beginning of last year's CITES meeting where the issue of reopening international trade in whale products was on the agenda. The BBC World Service broadcast the same story the day after.

«It appears that moves to open up commercial trade in whale meat at the Cites meeting could be stimulating the pirates to start their trade early,» said Chris Stroud of WDCS to the *Guardian*.

WDCS got its message out: pirate whaling and the smuggling of whale meat are unavoidable. Rather than reconsider permitting whaling and international trade at all, it would be better to ban them for ever.

Have so many years already passed since the British media swallowed the Brent Spar story? Do British journalists once again need to scrutinise their capacity for being duped?

in the spirit of UNDERSTANDING ...

"There is certain knowledge — even amongst the most ardent pro-whaling enthusiasts — that a whale is a highly evolved, sentient, cognisant animal with, at the very least, an awareness of its own life and environment."
Opening statement by Breach Marine Protection to the IWC in Oman.

"They are just big mountains of meat."
Olav Olavsen, an ardent pro-whaling enthusiast, talking about blue whales to the New York Times, July 23, 1997.

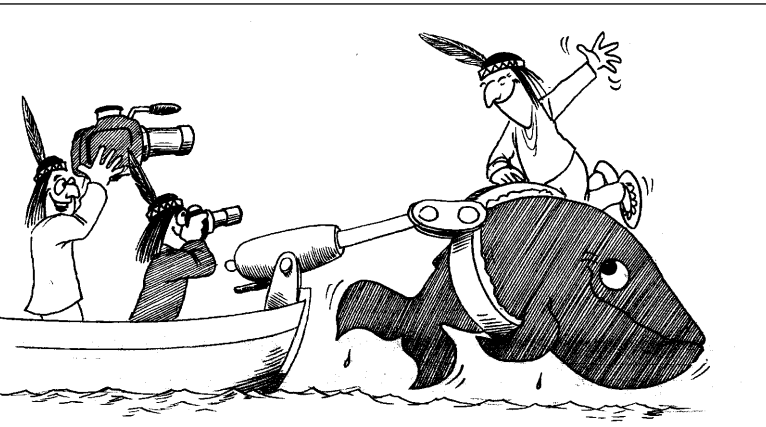
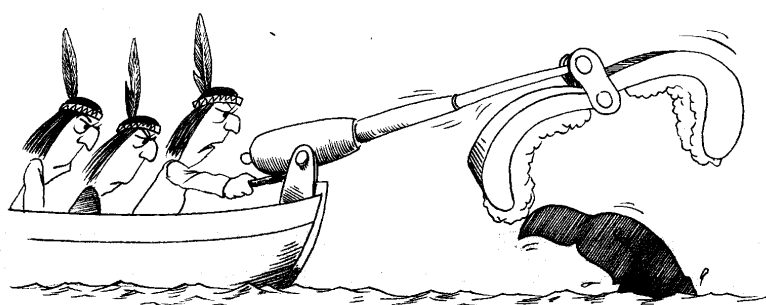
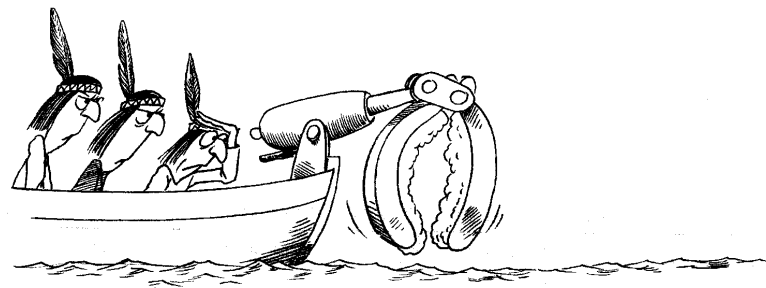
"The Bryde's whale suffers the indignity of having been named after a Norwegian named Johan Bryde who initiated a whaling operation in South Africa."
Phil Clapham in his 1997 book Whales.



Catch and Release?

"A non-lethal 'ritual whale hunt' ... would involve the Makah conducting their traditional preparations, but without actually touching the whale during their last approach."

Michael Kundu, Sea Shepherd Conservation Society.



Call us etymological pedants if you like, but there's a daft idea we would like to get on the record ... because in the IWC, daft ideas often come true.

In preparation for the day when the International Whaling Commission's only function is to regulate whale-watching, the English language is now being subverted so the IWC doesn't even need to change its name.

We first sensed something was amiss when the Irish Proposal was presented in Monaco. "Lethal scientific whaling should be phased out over a period," it suggested.

We gave Ireland the benefit of the doubt, and assumed it meant "lethal whaling conducted in the name of science". Surely any research conducted without killing whales would be plain old "whale research".

But then WWF New Zealand launched a campaign calling on the IWC "to prohibit all lethal whaling in the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary." So WWF-NZ supports non-lethal whaling, right?

Here in Oman, three countries — the US, New Zealand and Oman — have made references in their opening statements to "lethal scientific whaling".

And Michael Kundu of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society has suggested that the Makah forget about *killing* gray whales, and instead engage in "a non-lethal 'ritual whale hunt' which would involve the Makah conducting their traditional preparations, but without actually touching the whale during their last approach."

Before this gets out of hand and we end up with "cultural subsistence non-lethal whaling" quotas, the *Harpoon* suggests consigning the phrase "lethal whaling" to the rubbish bin — alongside those old EIA favourites "absolute extinction" and "completely dead"

HIGH NORTH ALLIANCE

The International Harpoon is published by the High North Alliance, an umbrella organisation representing whalers and sealers in Greenland, Iceland, the Faroes, Canada and Norway, as well as a number of fisheries organisations and local communities.

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