

Norway: Commercial Whaling on the Rise

In 1986, with many of the world's great whale populations severely depleted, the International Whaling Commission's moratorium on commercial whaling came into effect. The IWC is the only international body with the authority to manage whaling. In spite of this moratorium, whales today are still in danger.

Norway restarted commercial whale hunting in 1993, openly flouting the IWC's moratorium. Every year since then the IWC has passed a motion that condemns Norway for continuing to hunt whales—and every year the Norwegian government has ignored that ruling.

The Importance of International Treaties

All countries need to stand by international treaties. The Norwegian government holds that since Norway registered an objection to the IWC's moratorium decision, the country is not obligated to stand by the agreement.

The First Step Toward Extinction?

Why does the IWC continue to condemn commercial whaling? One reason is that the resumption of commercial whaling around the world could lead to a free-for-all, unregulated hunt similar to that which brought so many whale populations to the edge of extinction prior to the moratorium. Norway continues to pressure the international community to resume commercial whaling and open the trade of whale meat. Specifically, Norway has announced that at the CITES (Convention on International Trade and Endangered Species) convention in April 2000 it will attempt to downlist the whale population it is currently hunting, the Northeast Atlantic minke whale. Downlisting this population would remove restrictions on export and allow Norway to reopen the commercial whale meat trade with Japan.

Were the international community to give way to pressure from Norway, a legal global market would instantly open up and thousands of whales would be killed as a result. If more countries take up commercial whaling, monitoring or controlling the number of whales killed could prove impossible. Even now, with no legal international market, pirate whalers have been found to supply the lucrative Japanese market with whale meat from endangered species such as humpback whales. Whale meat from Norway being smuggled to Japan has been seized in both countries.



July 1994 North Sea
Greenpeace inflatable from SIRIUS in action
against Norwegian whaling ship SENET.
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Commercial Whaling Renounced Around the World

Norway is not the only country with a history of commercial whaling. Britain, Germany, Denmark and Russia have all traditionally been involved in commercial whaling. However, the governments of these countries ceased this practice once it became clear that whale populations could not survive commercial whaling. What differentiates Norway from other countries with equally strong commercial whaling traditions is the fact that Norway continues to threaten the survival of whale populations by keeping whaling alive and by pressing for an international whale meat trade despite an international moratorium on commercial hunting.

Stopping the Hunt

While commercial whaling may profit Norwegian whaling companies, there are economically viable alternatives. Whale watching is more profitable than whale hunting. As of 1994, 5.4 million people were going whale watching with total estimated annual revenues of U.S. \$504 million.¹ In the five years since, income from whale watching has increased at an annual rate of more than 16 percent. In Iceland—a country involved in commercial whaling until 1990—whale watching has tripled during the last three years, with more than 27,000 whale watchers taking excursions during 1998 alone. In 1997 tourism in Iceland generated ten times the annual revenue (adjusted for inflation) brought in by whaling in the early 1980s; if Iceland were to resume commercial whaling, even a small decrease in tourism would more than offset any expected whaling revenue. In the Caribbean, IWC member countries such as Dominica and St. Lucia are also beginning to enjoy the economic benefits that can be achieved from enabling tourists to watch whales in the wild.

The benefits of eco-tourism activities such as whale watching are spread over a larger portion of the population than whale hunting; in addition to whale watching operations, local residents running shops, hotels and restaurants can also experience increased employment and revenue opportunities.

Establishing A Global Whale Sanctuary

The international community must protect whales from the devastation of commercial whaling. Greenpeace is calling for a global whale sanctuary, meaning an end to commercial whaling around the world. The creation of a global sanctuary is a forward-thinking measure that would protect whales and encourage research on whales and the environment; it is the most effective way to ensure that the world will not return to the widespread commercial whale hunting that brought many whale species to the edge of extinction.

For more information and to voice your support for establishing a global whale sanctuary, visit the Greenpeace Nordic Web site at www.greenpeace.no/english or the Greenpeace International Web site at www.greenpeace.org.

¹Erich Hoyt, "The Worldwide Value and Extent of Whale Watching", Bath U.K.; Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, 1995.