

Whaling in Antarctica – a tale of slaughter

Herman Melville made the hunt for Moby Dick sound like a noble pitting of man's wits against a ferocious leviathan of the sea. The truth is that human greed and stupidity have produced a bloody history of persecution and carnage that threatens the continuing existence of some whale species. The facts:

- **First whaling station in Antarctica:** early 1900s. **A few hundred whales** are killed each year.
- Ten years later, **advances in shipbuilding** and the invention of the **harpoon cannon** drive the death toll into the **thousands**.
- By the mid 1920s, the **arrival of British and Norwegian factory ships** pushes the slaughter still higher.
- By the mid 1930s, whaling fleets from the **U.K., the U.S., Argentina, Denmark, Japan, Norway, the Netherlands, Russia,** and **Germany** hunt whales with **explosive harpoons** and send whale populations plummeting.
- Many species are pushed near the brink of extinction. **Blue whales once numbered about 275,000;** there are **now fewer than 5,000** remaining.
- In 1946, the International Whaling Commission recognizes that “...it is **essential to protect all species from over-fishing.**” Nearly 20 years later, in spite of resistance from the whaling industry, the **IWC finally bans the catching of blue whales** in the Antarctic.
- Some whalers move to smaller species; others resort to **cheating**. The **Russian whaling fleet**, according to Greenpeace, **caught more than 90,000 whales illegally** in the Antarctic between 1965 and the late 1970s.
- **Some countries stop whaling** in the Antarctic, but **Russia, Japan, and other countries continue the hunt**. Japan gets around whaling limits by **calling its catch “scientific.”**
- According to the Australian government, **Japan killed more than 6,500 Antarctic minke whales** during the 18 years it was conducting “research” on the whales, though much of the butchered flesh from Japanese hunts **winds up being stored in freezers**, as there is **insufficient market demand**.

- **Japan buys votes** in the International Whaling Commission by the payment of strings-attached **financial aid** (totaling nearly half a billion U.S. dollars) to developing Caribbean countries including **Grenada, Dominica, Antigua, and Barbuda, St. Lucia** and the **Solomon Islands**.
- A **fire in the Japanese whaling-factory ship Nisshan Maru** puts an early end to Japan's 2007 Antarctic whaling hunt. But that ship will likely be **repaired**, probably in time to begin **whaling in the North Pacific** later this year.
- Japan's whaling may violate the **Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources**, to which Japan is a signatory. Article II of the Convention requires that "Any harvesting and associated activities [in the Antarctic **must prevent**]...**decrease in the size of any harvested population** to levels below those which ensure its stable recruitment...[and] prevention of **changes...in the marine ecosystem which are not potentially reversible** over two or three decades..."
- The argument that whales deplete fishing stocks is **bogus**. Many **whales don't eat fish** at all; they eat **krill**. Of the thousands of whales cut open between 1987 and 2005, the **overwhelming majority have not a single fish in their stomachs**. A total of **less than 300 pounds** of fish are found in all the whales in all those years of "research".
- In **Iceland**, the government decision to **resume whaling** last year, in spite of an international moratorium, precipitates a **boycott by tourists** who would rather watch whales than witness their killing.
- Small **victory for the whales**: Environmentalist pressure causes **Nissui**, the parent company of **Gorton's Seafood** and New Zealand-based **Sealord**, to **withdraw its support for the whaling activities** of its corporate cousin, Kyodo Senpaku.

When the International Whaling Commission meets in May, Japan will try to use its influence to bring about an end the moratorium on commercial whaling. If the slaughter is to be stopped, it will take the concerted efforts of the powerful anti-whaling nations on the Commission: the U.S., Australia, the U.K., and Germany.



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