

The Conflicting Sides of the Whaling Debate

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Alberta, a young well-respected member of the Makah people in Washington's Olympic Peninsula, is invited to the next international summit on whaling that is going to take place in Fredrikstad, Norway. She comes from a long tradition of whalers, yet realizes that the motivation behind this practice has shifted over the decades and she believes her people should stop pursuing the hunting of whales. However, many other Makah people believe in maintaining tradition and do not agree with the quest to save the whales. The Fredrikstad summit is the perfect place for Alberta to express her feelings and maybe aid in the implementation of new policies on whaling, but also to hear all sides of the debate.

The issue at hand in Fredrikstad is whether or not there should be international standards that all nations, including native tribes, *must* obey, and to further the argument, should this mean the end to all hunting of whales *regardless* of reason? Alberta will be joined by the following other positions: **The United States representative of the International Whaling Commission (IWC)** who believes there must be an international regulatory body that works as hard as it can to gain support for the end of whaling or at least to instill mandatory guidelines; **Greenpeace** who believes that any whaling done for commercial purposes is punishable, but who at times support native tribes who whale for cultural purposes; **Representatives from both Norway and Japan** as the two nations who lead the world in whaling, but who say they do this for cultural and scientific reasons not economic; **Members from the Sea Shepherd Conservationists** who believe that whaling is *never* necessary and must be abolished (sometimes at all costs); and **Alaskan Natives** who believe in whaling as a form of cultural expression but who do not want to incorporate the practice into their tradition if it is going to be to an economic end (much like the Makah people).

History of the Makah people and Whaling in general

The Makahs live in the Northwestern United States in the little village of Neah Bay. They are situated midway in the California gray whale's migration path beginning in Cape Flattery where they breed and ending in the Arctic where they feed. Twice a year these creatures pass by Neah Bay and around 100 years ago the Makahs prepared for weeks for the big hunt. This particular species has been historic victims of large industrial whaling efforts. In 1928 the Makahs abandoned their tradition of hunting the gray whales because they realized that their hunts along with the industrial practices were leading the species to extinction. The gray whales in addition received U.S protection from whaling and consequently their numbers increased. In 1997 the gray whale was removed from the endangered species list and the Makah gained permission to resume their traditional hunting.

The act of whaling itself has been around much longer than that practiced by the Makahs. Thousands of years ago, Alaskan natives and Norwegians first partook in *subsistence* whaling as a source of food and clothing. Whaling is known as a Norwegian practice that has its roots in providing goods such as oil/blubber for fuel, whalebones for corsets, and the meat for food (Distinctive Features). Many styles of harpoons have been used throughout the years to perfect the art of hunting whales which has led to the detrimental decrease in many species.

Around 1913, 9500 whales were killed in the Antarctic region alone and this represented 40 percent of the world stock. After WWI whaling subsided but this did not last long, and from 1921 to 1931 whale oil production increased about eight times. The number of whales being killed at this time was so high that there was an oversupply of oil and the resulting endangerment of many species. As a result, in 1931 in Geneva 21 countries signed an agreement called the Convention of Regulation of Whaling. However, no quotas were established and there was actually no reduction in the number of whales being hunted. This led to the formation of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling in 1946 (IWC) which to this day is the main body for dictating whale management and regulatory policies.

In 1982 the IWC approved a moratorium or suspension on all commercial whaling. This forced the whaling states to redefine their whaling practices as being for “scientific” or “cultural” purposes. Today the prominent whaling nations consist of Norway and Japan and Iceland. They believe in their right to practice whaling as it benefits their nations culturally and scientifically, and oppose the United States as the prominent power who threatens to implement economic sanctions and other ways of controlling the whaling nations. There are also other players in the whaling debate -- the following are the various sides:

The International Whaling Commission (IWC) – U.S. Representative James Baker

“Few species stir human emotions as deeply as the great whales” (President’s Note). Whales are a vital part of the marine ecosystem as well as a sacred creature that deserves the best in protection, and this is where the IWC comes into play. The common goal of saving the whales dates back to the 1960’s in the U.S. when, after decades of whaling activity and a peak of 66,000 whales killed in one year, there arose a popular demand for international protection of these creatures. Since then the U.S. has led numerous actions to end whaling activity internationally. In the 1970’s eight whale species were declared endangered. Whaling today is considered an international environmental problem.

The IWC was created and continues to gain support on the basis that no nation should hunt whales. However, there is no way of making all nations abide by this agreement, and a nation lodging a formal objection to the moratorium is technically not bound by it. So the commission has to use other tactics to increase involvement and make whaling nations into *non*-whaling members. The IWC constantly recruits new nations who have no vested interest in whaling activity, and also threatens economic sanctions on those nations who do still practice whaling. The power to instill economic sanctions means “the ability of a country to give or withhold economic benefits such as access to markets or economic assistance that can persuade states dependent on those benefits to go along with that power’s policy” (Distinctive Features). The IWC is willing to use numerous methods in order to pressure nations into complying with non-whaling standards. The U.S. has traditionally “encouraged” states to prohibit whaling by banning the import of fish products and also denying fish permits within a 200-mile zone to any country that violates international whaling prohibitions. However, there have been times when the U.S. has not wanted to impose economic sanctions due to various political reasons. In 1988 for example, the U.S. signed an agreement with Iceland allowing its hunting of whales for “scientific” purposes for fear of being denied use of its Reykjavik Air Force base.

The issue of sustainable development is at the center of all environmental concerns. Accurately measuring the whale stocks and calculating the number or quota that a nation can have of a certain species in a certain period of time is crucial so that the whale numbers will continue to grow at sustainable rates. Sustainability was one of the topics discussed in the Stockholm Conference in 1972, and one of the results was that there should be cooperation over international issues, which includes whaling. Also there was “stress on the right of individual nations to determine population and resource policies” (Adams, 38). However, the U.S. does not have sufficient confidence in the way in which other nations as well as organizations within the U.S. itself assess whale stocks. The U.S. believes that the way in which some countries such as Norway calculate their quotas and the stocks of whales is inaccurate. The U.S. in general and as representing the IWC will not condone whaling for commercial purposes and strives to spread awareness of the problem internationally.

Greenpeace

Modern commercial whaling consists of over-exploitation and whale stocks are suffering at extreme rates. Whales have long gestation periods and generally give birth only every one or two years which means that it takes almost twice that long for young calves to mature. For this reason whales can never quickly recover from such major depletions in their populations when whaling is allowed. Therefore, any type of whaling activity such as that done for commercial purposes, which reduces the number of whales at such extreme rates, should not be allowed. Greenpeace opposes all commercial whaling and would never support any system that would authorize quotas to kill whales.

There is definite tension even within the ranks of Greenpeacers themselves, but there always has been support for whaling done for subsistence purposes by natives such as those in Greenland. There also have been recent incidents off the coast of Alaska where Greenpeace aided a vessel in towing an already dead whale to shore. In 1997 using inflatable rafts, a few members of a Greenpeace crew helped tow the whale killed by Siberian Yup'ik whalers. Outside investigations have stated about this Greenpeace activity, “I don't care if it was dead or alive, it is an endangered species and you should leave it alone...just because they are Greenpeace doesn't mean they are exempt from whaling laws” (Greenpeace harpooned). This commentary detracts from Greenpeace's credibility as an environmental agency, yet still the organization maintains that they condone native subsistence whaling and vehemently oppose whaling for commercial purposes.

However, the double standard may actually be founded with the idea that Greenpeace supports the end to whaling but at the same time they realize that there will probably *never* be an end to all whaling. “No amount of conservationist good sense will be able to save the moratorium from Japanese and Norwegian scientific and political poker-playing” (Strategy Row). The environmental legitimacy of Greenpeace is definitely questionable, but they may have a good point that the U.S. will never be able to extend its ideas and moratorium on whaling to all nations, so there must be some compromises made.

Representatives from Norway and Japan

In 1993 Norway resumed hunting whales for political reasons when scientists were hired by the government to calculate whale stocks and realized that the Northeast Atlantic minke

whale were at great numbers. The numbers scientists presented were found to be misleading however, and since then Norway has described whaling as a “traditional activity of very small scale, catching only minke whales” (Norwegian Whaling). Most politicians and much of the population of Norway want a return to whaling. If it were not for the IWC, whalers from this country would be hunting about 2,000 minke whales a year, which is the historical average although not a sustainable one. In 1998 Norway’s IWC Commissioner stated that , “Norway will never accept a ban on export of whale products” (Norwegian Whaling).

Norway asserts that they never agreed to be a non-whaling nation under IWC law. One Norwegian stated at a 1996 IWC meeting, “we are tired of these yearly resolutions against our legal whale hunting...the resolutions remind [me] strongly of a majority dictatorship” (Whale news clips). Once again, the U.S. and IWC is targeted as practicing environmental imperialism finding fault with other nations that do not agree with the regulations.

The U.S. has been involved in many international decisions where they appear to attempt to govern other nation’s actions simply because they are an economically and militarily powerful country. U.S. “environmental imperialism” is a control mechanism over other nations that have less access to resources for sustainable decisions (Daly, 187 & 191). The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) would bind all nations when it comes to trading, and this is a similar agreement that the U.S. as the leader of non-whaling nations claims we need for the hunting of whales. However, should all nations be bound to an agreement due to American standards? What right does the U.S. have to impose its standards on the negatives of hunting whales when other nations may have contradicting standards?

Norway’s resumption of whaling was due to government efforts which today fund programs to encourage the eating of whale meat. This is meant to justify the numbers of whales caught each year, although there is serious questioning of the truthfulness behind the numbers gathered by Norwegian scientists. One Norwegian whaler in support of whaling for food claims,

“not everybody in this world can live in luxury and eat vegetarian food...the whale is just an animal like every other animal. I have noticed that it is claimed that the whale is especially intelligent and that it can sing. I have never heard a whale sing...they don’t deserve to have an opinion. I eat the kind of meat I want to...and in the ultimate consequence both the lettuce and the carrot are living individuals” (Whale news clips).

Norway maintains its standpoint that it has voted *against* the decisions of the IWC, and therefore will continue to hunt whales.

Japan is another nation that claims its commercial whaling has specific social and cultural values that are unique to Japan. The Japanese people’s long history of hunting primarily Sei and Sperm whales has been passed down from generation to generation. Japan has consistently opposed IWC regulations and currently whales the North Pacific and Southern Ocean around Antarctica for “research” purposes.

Japan's spokesmen for the IWC claim that a few coastal towns are actually *suffering* from the moratorium on commercial whaling. The Japanese government has published an article entitled, "Commercial Vs. Subsistence, Aboriginal Vs. Nonaboriginal, and the Concept of Sustainable Development in the Context of Japanese Coastal Fisheries Management," that discusses the semantic differences between the terms "sustainable" and "commercial" and applies them to the whaling practices needed by a few coastal villages. The article claims that if sustainability is the goal of management politics then it does not really matter whether practices are labeled commercial or not. What really seems to be the issue is that of self-sufficiency. This means that people are supposed to produce only what they need and their products may not enter any market for economic purposes. However, a truly self-sufficient society does not currently exist and it is not fair that being an affluent first-world society is used *against* such nations as Japan and Norway.

In 1991 the IWC decided to permit aboriginal subsistence whaling as; "whaling for purposes of local aboriginal consumption carried out by or on behalf of aboriginal, indigenous or native peoples who share strong community, familial social and cultural ties related to a continuing traditional dependence on whaling and the use of whales" (Commercial Vs. Subsistence). It has been argued that Japanese whaling practices have more in common with aboriginal subsistence whaling than the strict definitions of commercial whaling. The vessels they use are relatively small and operations exist in community-oriented towns in order to enhance that village's identity rather than simply make revenue for the nation.

Legal arguments used by both Norway and Japan to oppose IWC and other regulations on whaling are underlined with the idea that there is no scientific evidence to support the moratorium. Also, the threat of economic sanctions is in violation of GATT trading rules, and they claim that the U.S. policies are hypocritical because of allowing such groups as Alaskan natives to hunt whales. There is also the moral argument attacking the U.S. that says, Americans eat cows, why are whales exempt and why must the U.S. impose its hypocritical views of animal "worth" on other nations (class notes, Gov. 263)?

Sea Shepherd Conservationists

The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society is headed by "Captain" Paul Watson who has been labeled an "Earth Warrior". The group was established in 1977 by Watson who left Greenpeace because he felt the original goals of the organization were being compromised and he needed a more strictly environmental endeavor. The Sea Shepherds are an organization very much against the hunting of whales for *any* reason and was established on the grounds that it would defend the world's marine wildlife in order to maintain global biodiversity, sometimes, at any cost. In 1997 the group offered a financial reward of \$68,000 to anyone who freed five orca whales caught by Japanese fishermen. This radical measure was taken in order to save "one of the most intelligent life-forms on the planet" (The price of freedom). The Sea Shepherds have also been engaged in controversial activities such as sinking whale vessels off the coast of Norway.

The Sea Shepherds oppose any form of native whaling, such as that practiced by the Makah people, because they claim that if this group is given the right then many others will demand the same right to hunt whales and this will lead to over-exploitation. There should be no

whaling for any reason throughout the world as whales are necessary, meaningful creatures who deserve life.

Alaskan Native whalers

The beluga population has declined by 47 percent from 1994 to 1999 and many members of the Alaskan natives are ready to stop hunting whales and instead strengthen their sense of culture. Native hunters come from a tradition of killing belugas and historically took only what they needed for their families to survive. However, the whaling practices of today have shifted motivation and native commercial whalers are shooting as many as 25 whales each a season. Intense hunting puts stress on the stocks and if the trend continues they will soon become over-exploited to a point of endangerment.

The commercial market for whales has grown in the native villages and for many people, if they are having trouble finding work, they hunt whales and sell them in Anchorage. Their current practices are unsustainable. “At least one market near Anchorage sells vacuum-packed beluga for \$6 a pound. It’s a big seller with customers seeing pink muktuk, or blubber, still attached to its gray and white skin” (Alaskan Tribes Halt). There are no rules to the hunt and many natives pursue the instillation of regulations so that whale stocks are not completely depleted under the guise of their native culture.

Commercial whaling is not a native practice. A leader of the Native hunters says that “right now, we would usually be hunting, but we have agreed to stand down. We will stand down for the whole year. That’s how much the Eskimos believe in preserving their food” (Alaskan Tribes Halt). Whale meat is a large part of the Alaskan Native diets, but many hunters are not killing the whales in the proper way or using them for the traditional purposes. This has led many natives to stop hunting and instead save the whales. Preserving culture is important to these Alaskan natives, but not at the expense of endangering whale populations and hunting for non-traditional, commercial purposes.

Alberta’s own words

After hearing all other sides to the debate on whaling, Alberta has a few words of her own to say about the Makah people and why she feels there needs to be more regulations – even on an international level:

“My dream is that I wake up one morning and the Tribal Council has called a conference to make a statement: we now realize that the whale gave up his life for us a hundred years ago so that we could eat. Now we want to honor and protect the whale until the end of time.

In Baja [where I recently attended another whaling conference], I met what I was fighting for, face to face. A mother whale rose up out of those warm waters right under my hand. She looked me straight in the eye, mother to mother. Then I saw a harpoon scar on her side, probably from up north in Siberia where the native people still hunt the whales for sustenance. The mother brought her baby over to our little boat. I talked to them and I petted them. I felt their spirit of trust was somehow being conveyed to me. I laughed and I cried all the way back to shore, and all that night.

Many of our tribal members feel that our health problems result from the loss of our traditional seafood and sea mammal diet. [They] also believe that the problems troubling our young people stem from lack of discipline and pride. And [they] hope that resuming whaling will help restore that. We’ve, [the Makah people], survived just fine without whale meat for as long as I’ve been alive, and our kids don’t have

problems with violence, drugs, or alcohol because we stopped whaling. We simply became more like the outside world. Besides, the whaling crew hasn't really prepared. Certainly not in the spiritual sense of our ancestors.

The salmon, not the whale, is our real subsistence food. Why doesn't the council put their energy into fighting for our fish?...All this beautiful scenery – if we started a whale-watching business here, we could tell people about our culture, and we wouldn't have to kill anything for it.” In a tribe where there are many internal conflicts and many aimed at Alberta herself, she says, “My aunt always told me, if your enemy has a potlach [a festive gathering] and you're invited, you go and take part. She said it was my duty” (Tribal tradition).

Questions to think about

- *After reading the differing sides to the issue of whaling at the Norwegian conference, do you think Alberta's vision can become reality?
- *Will there ever be a complete end to whaling across nations?
- *What role should the U.S. play?
- *Does the IWC do what it set out to do? How can it gather support from all nations?
- *Why does this debate exist over whales and not other mammals?