Whaling Ban Threatened

Nations vow to defy vote to protect great whales from extinction

A handful of countries, serving only their own greedy self-interests at the expense of the world’s few remaining great whales, are threatening to sabotage the only hope of survival left to these magnificent creatures. Japan, the U.S.S.R., Norway, and Peru have filed formal objections with the International Whaling Commission (IWC) to that body’s landmark decision to ban commercial whaling as of 1986. Iceland, Brazil, and South Korea, the world’s other whaling nations, may join this infamous quartet and add their own objections before the filing deadline in 1983. Unless animal-welfare proponents act decisively now, years of negotiation and scientific inquiry—and the historic vote of July 23, 1982—could be jeopardized.

On that date, three-quarters of the 37 IWC member nations agreed to bring to a close the many years of cruel exploitation which has decimated many whale species. Despite the whales’ dwindling numbers, modern fleets still prowl the world’s oceans in search of the pathetically few remnants of the once numerous great whale herds. And for what? To render these gentle, intelligent animals into soap, perfume, or lipstick—frivolous luxuries for which perfectly adequate nonanimal substitutes are readily available! This totally unnecessary butchery has persisted for so long that, today, several species of great whales, including the largest mammal on earth, the blue whale, are so scarce that they may never recover. Several other species teeter on the brink of extinction.

To forestall the complete annihilation of the great whales, a host of conscientious animal protectionists have lobbied for years to gain some measure of protection for them. The IWC vote, therefore, was cause for great celebration for those who worked on the whales’ behalf. But hopes for recovery of the endangered whale species were gravely damaged in November, when four of the major whaling nations officially announced their intention to defy the ban and continue whaling. The IWC, a body without any police powers, is unable to stop member nations from defying its decisions. This was hammered home last year when Japan, Norway, the U.S.S.R., Brazil, and Iceland objected to an IWC ban on the use of the cold harpoon, a torturous device that kills whales by causing massive hemorrhage and a slow agonizing death. The five nations argued that more humane killing methods destroyed too much of the meat to be economically feasible, and that they had been unable and, in most cases, unwilling to develop a more humane and effective killing device.

Although the IWC cannot enforce its rulings, the U.S. has two laws which, if invoked, would impose sanctions against countries refusing to abide by IWC decisions. The Reagan administration has indicated a willingness to use those laws, but the political pressures, especially from Japan and Norway, not to do so will be great. We need your help to ensure that the IWC decisions will prevail. You can help us save the whales. We are so close to total victory.
Modern Whaling — Cruelty on the High Seas —

Whaling is not only a tragedy because of the damage it’s done to the world’s whale populations, but also because it employs one of the cruelest killing methods ever devised by man. Most of today’s whalers prey on the minke whale, one of the smallest of the great whales, primarily because the larger species (including the blue and humpback whales) have all been so overhunted that they require complete protection if they are to survive. Those larger whales still hunted are killed with an explosive harpoon that strikes the animal, then, after imbedding itself inside the whale, blows up, causing extensive internal damage. Sometimes the charge fails to explode or misses a vital organ and the whale continues to swim back to an injured companion to try to protect it. The whalers take advantage of this tendency and easily kill those who have come to save their mates.

After years of protest by The HSUS and other animal-welfare groups, the IWC recognized that this extreme cruelty could not continue. In 1981, it voted to ban the use of the cold harpoon after a two-year phase-out. Those two years have passed, and the Soviet Union is still using the cold harpoon—in contravention of the ban. It is expected that Iceland, Norway, and Brazil, other nations that filed objections, will also be in violation when their whaling seasons begin this spring. Japan claims to be in compliance.

Norway has become one of the most intractable of all whaling nations, refusing even to consider ending whaling. Fortunately, some Norwegian citizens aren’t totally in support of their government’s actions. Last May, the Norwegian Animal Protection Society, backed by the advice and encouragement of The HSUS and other U.S. and international animal-welfare groups, filed suit against Norway’s department of fisheries, charging that use of the cold harpoon violates Norway’s 1974 animal-protection law. The government tried to argue that whaling was a foreign policy issue and that the animal-protection group had no standing to sue. However, a judge ruled last fall that the group did have standing and ordered that the case be heard this spring. If this lawsuit is decided in the animals’ favor, it could force Norway out of whaling completely. This may be the only way to stop a government which tries to justify both its whaling and its participation in the baby harp seal hunt each year in Canada.

The HSUS hopes that whaling is an industry whose demise is not far off. We must make sure, however, that whaling ends before it ends the whales. Today, only a handful of nations still whale, and most of them still nearly their entire take to Japan. Although its own whaling industry is quite small (employing only about 1,300 people directly), the Japanese government has been adamant in its refusal to end whaling, claiming whale meat represents a major protein source for the land-poor nation. Studies show, however, that whale meat accounts for only one tenth of one percent of Japan’s protein consumption! The most likely explanation, and one that the Japanese administration to invoke sanctions against nations refusing to abide by the rulings of the IWC. “In order to avoid any thought that the U.S. can be ‘faced down’ on the whaling issue, we should make it absolutely clear now that the United States will invoke [our two laws] against any nation violating IWC decisions,” wrote Senator Robert Packwood. In a December letter to the Senate responding to an inquiry about Japanese fishing allocations, the State Department said, “We are also prepared to use available laws and regulations, beginning this spring [when the fishing allocations are given], to prevent Japan from thwarting the IWC cessation decision.” We are hoping that those potential sanctions by the U.S. could have a real impact on the newly elected Japanese government officials. It is up to us to ensure that these sanctions are invoked.

What The HSUS Is Doing

The Humane Society of the U.S. has always opposed whaling because it is incredibly cruel, ethically repugnant, and because overhunting has endangered several species. HSUS Vice President for Program and Communications Patricia Forkan
has been attending the IWC meetings as an official observer since 1973 and participated in several important decisions in favor of the whales, including last year's vote on the 1986 cessation. She will continue to attend IWC meetings and intends to work to see that the quotas allowed the whaling nations are significantly reduced between now and 1986.

For several years The HSUS has helped underwrite the publication of Eco, a pro-whale newsletter distributed daily at the IWC meeting.

We have helped make it possible for Japanese conservationists to attend the IWC, and we continue to work closely with other groups on this truly international effort.

The HSUS is also working at home to end whaling, by encouraging and sponsoring meetings and seminars on the importance of whales. Perhaps most important, we are putting pressure on the U.S. government to invoke sanctions against nations that defy the IWC and are working with concerned members of Congress to keep them informed about the fight—both here and abroad—to end whaling once and for all.

We are now asking our members to pitch in for this major effort to end commercial whaling forever.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Even though the U.S. already prohibits all whaling within our 200-mile coastal zones under the U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act, don't think that you are powerless to affect the outcome of this fight. Here are some things you can do to help.

• Send the enclosed postcards to the Japanese and Norwegian officials indicated. The new Japanese government must know that U.S. citizens will not stand by and allow them to obliterate the world's great whales. We have also targeted Norway for our members to contact because officials not only adamantly insist they will continue to kill whales with inhumane methods, but they also participate in and defend the Canadian harp seal hunt.

• Write to President Reagan (The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20500). Encourage him not to back down from his hard-line stance and, if necessary, to invoke the Pelly and Packwood-Magnuson Amendments against nations that refuse to abide by IWC rulings.

• Ask supermarkets and fast-food restaurants not to buy fish from whaling countries. Norway, Iceland, and Japan in particular, send massive amounts of fish to this country—much of which is used in fast-food fish sandwiches. Send for our "Send a message" cards that you can give to merchants explaining why you aren't buying fish from countries that refuse to abide by IWC decisions. Contributors of $10 or more will automatically receive 10 of these cards. Additional cards may be purchased at 20 for $1.

• Finally, help us continue our long-standing programs to save the whales. In the past, your financial support has made it possible for us to establish aggressive and effective programs to protect marine mammals and millions of other animals from unnecessary pain and suffering. Please place your tax-deductible contribution in the enclosed envelope and send it today—we need you more than ever in the home stretch.