

Sustainable Whaling in Contemporary Perspective:
Introductory Remarks

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Whaling in current times remains a problematic common property management issue, both because of the difficulties inherent in managing fugitive common-pool resources for sustainable use and for another, and quite new, consideration, namely the high symbolic and emotional loading accorded, for whatever reason, to this particular class of natural resource.

The papers in today and tomorrow's three whaling sessions will explore some of these issues and, hopefully, lead to constructive discussion of the problems. It is important to remind ourselves that the impact of these problems is more especially focused upon those whose dependence on the resource is greatest, namely individuals and communities having developed cultural, social, nutritional and economic dependencies on these particular fishery resources. It is for this reason that most of the presenters at these sessions are social scientists, for the biological aspects of management are addressed each year at the meetings of the Scientific Committee of the International Commission. Thus this present meeting is one of a series of meetings organized to provide opportunity to explore and present the human side of this management debate through discussions to be held here and through subsequent publication of the views expressed.

The designated international whale management organization is the International Whaling Commission (IWC). This is an organization that has been in existence for more than forty years, and it operates under the rules set down in 1946 under the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW) and as amended from time to time by motions supported by a two-third majority of those members voting. A paper prepared for this meeting by Dr. Ray Gambell, Secretary to the Commission, is available for distribution and describes the background history and ongoing activities of the IWC.

Gambell's paper refers to some of the new directions occurring in the IWC discussions. Some of these new issues will be alluded to, or discussed in the papers presented here. These opening comments will attempt to link these main issues currently under discussion at the IWC to the papers at this symposium.

Some of the main issues being discussed during the IWC annual meetings over the past four or five years more especially include:

A new improved management procedure for commercial whaling;

Aboriginal whaling and the management of small cetaceans;

The future of the moratorium on commercial whaling;

The nature and classification of small-type coastal whaling;
Ethical concerns surrounding the killing of whales.

The Revised Management Procedure

A new and improved management procedure (the so-called Revised Management Procedure) was adopted at the 1991 IWC meeting. This Revised Management Procedure replaces the earlier New Management Procedure (adopted in 1975) which in turn replaced the original procedure employing the Blue Whale Unit (BWU) quota system. The RMP is briefly described in Gambell's paper; however, though not addressed directly in any other papers in this symposium, those by Andresen and Hoel more especially have a bearing on the implementation of the RMP in so far as they raise the question of the effectiveness of the IWC in relation to the regulation of whaling. As Gambell's paper makes clear, the present ideological orientation of the majority of members of the IWC favours the preservation (i.e. non-consumptive use) of whales, rather than their conservation or sustainable use, so that the whaling interests of a minority of members are easily denied by the voting behaviour of the majority.

In this situation the credibility of the IWC as an international body to regulate whaling becomes suspect. Andresen's paper evaluates the performance of the IWC, and Hoel's paper describes the predictable response of those several nations who find the resumption of whaling based on scientific management principles blocked by the effectively anti-whaling policies of the larger number of non-whaling IWC member states. A paper submitted by Conrad and Bjorndal points out the further inadequacy of the IWC in evaluating or utilizing technical information of a bioeconomic nature relevant to the operation of sustainable whale fisheries.

It is as well to remember in this context, that the purpose of concluding a convention setting up an international whaling body was explicitly stated in the 1946 Convention as being to provide for the proper conservation of whales in order to make possible the orderly development of the whaling industry. Furthermore, it is stated, in Covention Article V, that measures adopted by the IWC in order to achieve optimal utilization of whale resources shall take into consideration the interests of the consumers and producers of whale products. The statements and actions of some member countries during IWC meetings gives strong support to the idea that their principal reasons for continuing as members is work against the possibility of achieving these particular objectives in this century.

Aboriginal Whaling and the Management of Small Cetaceans

The first set of papers to be presented tomorrow morning relate more expressly to the situation of aboriginal-subsistence whaling. This category of whaling is only partially under IWC jurisdiction, that is in those cases where baleen whales are taken in aboriginal fisheries in, e.g., the Caribbean (humpback whales), Alaska (bowhead and, rarely, gray whales), Greenland (fin, humpback and minke whales) and Siberia (gray whales). Generally the smaller, toothed, whales are taken in aboriginal-subsistence whale fisheries; as a consequence of involving "small cetaceans" only, these fisheries fall under national (not

IWC) management.

The aboriginal whaling issue at IWC is linked to two other issues, one being the definitions accorded the crucial terms "subsistence" and "commercial" (as applied to whaling), and the other is the debate at the IWC as to whether the Commission has jurisdictional competence to manage small cetaceans.

The paper by Harwood and Adams, and the one by Pike, Richard and Goodman, describe ongoing efforts to bring the management of two small cetacean species in the Arctic under appropriate regional (in these two cases, binational) control. In the former case the Inuit users of the resource in Alaska and the Western Canadian Arctic have taken an important management initiative with the goal of satisfying beluga whale conservation needs in a manner entirely consonant with the indigenous users' cultural values and institutions.

The Pike, Richard and Goodman paper discusses a similar regional initiative in the Eastern Arctic, where Inuit hunters in both Canada and Greenland exploit shared stocks of narwhal and (likely) beluga also. In this case Canada and Greenland have established a joint management structure where, as in the Alaska/Canada initiative in the western Arctic, the resource users' concerns are fully taken into account when devising research and management plans.

The limited understanding and absence of any appropriate response at the IWC to the concerns expressed by whale users, prompted one whaling nation (Iceland) to announce, in 1991, its withdrawal from the IWC; others have suggested they may follow suit. Certainly some of the most heated debates at the annual meetings centre upon the limited consideration paid to the concerns expressed by the resource users, despite the requirement in the ICRW that their concerns be taken into account. The papers by Caulfield and Doubleday speak to this particular issue.

There seems little doubt that the diverse rurally-based communities of whale users, irrespective of their nationality or whether aboriginal or non-aboriginal, share many identical cultural perspectives based upon their common social, nutritional and economic dependence upon whales. This convergence of perspectives appears to contrast with views held by some of their urban compatriots who for various reasons currently appear to oppose any harvesting of whales. But the fact of the matter is that all arguments about what does, or does not, constitute appropriate use of whales are cultural, with quite different sets of valuations being held by different groups of people as to what constitutes legitimate use. Arguments within and without the IWC are supported with assertions pro and con based upon these differing cultural perspectives, some of which are explored in the last three papers in the symposium.

The Future of the Moratorium on Commercial Whaling

The introduction of a moratorium on commercial whaling by the IWC in 1986, and the current campaigns seeking to extend the moratorium are dependent upon a number of considerations. Opponents of whaling often state, or appear to support the notion, that in practical terms it is virtually impossible to regulate commercial whaling on a sustainable basis. In their view the

reintroduction of commercial whaling will inevitably lead to the extinction of whale stocks or even whale species. This particular viewpoint appears to overlooks the fact that even though unregulated commercial whaling in the past severely depleted some whale stocks, nevertheless no species of whale, and arguably no stocks either, have been driven to extinction by the actions of commercial whalers. Furthermore, as Gambell's paper makes clear, even before the notion of a moratorium was seriously considered by the IWC, that body had already imposed zero quotas on some of the most economically-valued whale species, viz. the blue whale, right whales and the humpback, as well as introducing a number of other whale conservation measures.

Over the years there has been one main economic argument (by C.W. Clark) used to support the notion that commercial whalers will inevitably harvest whales at unsustainable rates. A paper prepared for this symposium by Conrad and Bjorndal suggests that there are other and more realistic economic analyses that can be helpful in developing an economically rational and biologically sustainable whale fishery; their work is based upon analysis of the Norwegian small-type whale fishery exploiting part of the North Atlantic minke whale stock.

The Nature and Classification of Small-type Whaling

Mention of the minke whale serves to link the aboriginal whaling issue to the commercial whaling issue, for minke whales are harvested by both these classes of fishery. Caulfield's paper describes some essentials of minke whaling as practised in west Greenland.

In the IWC context the Greenland case is interesting; despite being categorized as aboriginal-subsistence whaling by IWC it is acknowledged to be a commercially-important activity, fully integrated into the cash economy of a modern nation. Yet it is reasonably and unambiguously classified as an aboriginal whale fishery, despite its evidently well-developed commerciality and other characteristics (e.g. vessel type and non-local consumption of whale products) normally associated with small-type whaling.

A second paper prepared by Gambell for this symposium (on aboriginal-subsistence whaling management at the IWC) provides the working definitions of such terms as "aboriginal subsistence whaling" and "local consumption", concepts central to the IWC's special exemption from regulations designed to regulate commercial whaling. However, it is quite apparent that these terms as defined could apply to small-scale coastal whaling adaptations found in other countries, e.g. Japan or Norway, where some rural people living in whaling communities possess the same or similar local dependencies upon whale harvesting as do aboriginal people living elsewhere.

This issue illustrates another of the IWC credibility problems revolving around that body's seemingly capricious use of definitions of such critical terms as "aboriginal-subsistence" and "commercial". Despite a considerable body of technical literature generated to inform recent debate, the IWC persists in recognizing only two categories of whaling into which must be placed all whale fisheries, no matter how varied and overlapping in nature they may be.

There is one very serious problem with the IWC's simplistic binary classification that places whaling into one of only two categories, and that has nothing to do with whale management. Due to the existence of only these two recognized categories of whaling (viz., aboriginal-subsistence or commercial) IWC actions appear arbitrary and highly discriminatory, and likely run counter to the various UN treaties and conventions enacted in support all peoples' social, economic and cultural (i.e. human) rights. This particular whaling classification continues to render the IWC incapable of accommodating and according equal standing to the cultural, social, economic and nutritional needs of non-aboriginal whalers as it accords to aboriginals, despite the well-documented similarity of each group's subsistence circumstances. Whatever this behaviour may reflect in regard to Commissioners' attitudes toward non-aboriginal whalers, this lack of equality can certainly be construed as being offensively condescending to aboriginal whalers.

Ethical Concerns Surrounding Whale Use

Another issue involving classification is raised in the paper by Kalland. In his paper the whale is seen to be categorized not as a material resource to be utilized for food and economic support, but rather, as a sacred symbol, a totem, adopted by groups opposed to any consumptive use of whales. This is not to say the whale ceases to have economic value, quite the contrary, it is put to good use in fund-raising campaigns that are necessary to fuel opposition to whaling at the national level and ultimately at the IWC. That it is indeed a potent symbol is confirmed in the paper by Einarsson, who indicates that moral, rather than merely aesthetic issues are invoked in sustaining (and at the most recent IWC meeting, escalating) the arguments against whale use.

Despite called-for proscriptions against consumptive use of whales, some uses are seen to be permissible by some groups. Ris' paper analyses one such permissible non-consumptive use that few hold to be unacceptable, namely whale watching. This activity, promoted by anti-whaling groups as an acceptable economic substitution for whale harvesting, is not wholly benign as some advocates would suggest and as discussed in Ris' paper.

Some Concluding Remarks

I mentioned at the outset that this symposium is intended to broaden and deepen discussion on the question of sustainable whaling. This is to be accomplished by convening international discussions, such as the present one, relevant to the topic.

In 1990, the North Atlantic Studies Centre, at Aarhus University, hosted an international conference that discussed whaling issues in the North Atlantic region. In 1992 another major event is planned to be held in conjunction with the First International Congress of Arctic Social Science. Two smaller meetings are also scheduled to take place early in 1992, one in Taiji, Japan, the other in Nevada, related to critical examination of subsistence use of marine resources as these uses relate to current discussions at the IWC.

The 1990 conference results were quickly published in an appropriate journal; the person responsible for organizing that conference and editing the

proceedings, Elisabeth Vestergaard, is participating in this symposium. The suggestion has been made that during the next few days here in Winnipeg, an International Network for the Study of Whaling be constituted and launched. Such a network will aim to effect communication among those interested in keeping up with current developments in whaling studies, and will hopefully link individuals whose interests derive from their involvement in research, policy, management or practice. A convenient time for an organizational meeting to launch the network will be announced during the symposium tomorrow.