

Norwegian voices against whaling

NOAH - for Animal Rights is Norway's largest animal rights organization. NOAH has led the campaign against the whaling industry and the sealing industry in Norway since its foundation in 1989, and is the only group to have consistently campaigned on these issues over the last 20 years. NOAH is a non-profit organization that always promotes the animals' best interest.

The Norwegian Society for Protection of Animals (NSPA) was founded in 1859 and is Norway's oldest and largest animal welfare organization. NSPA is an umbrella organization with 27 local groups and approximately 10,000 members from all over the country. NSPA works to spread knowledge about the importance of animal welfare as well as aiming to influence the attitudes of people towards animals. Based on ethical grounds, NSPA is opposed to all hunting of marine mammals.

Norwegian whale hunting: Norway's opinion

Contrary to the impression from official Norwegian information, the Norwegian public has grown more diverse in its attitudes towards whale hunting over the last years. Results from a public opinion poll conducted in June 2009, show that:

- One in three Norwegians believe that Norway should begin a phase out of commercial whale hunting with respect to animal welfare issues.
- Only 21% of people asked think that it is acceptable that hunted whales may take from several minutes to over an hour to die.
- Only 7% of Norwegians eat whale meat on a regular basis and one in five people have never tasted whale meat.

This opinion poll mirrors a general trend in Norwegian society of an increasing awareness to animal welfare issues.

It is time that the Norwegian government acknowledges these attitudes and carefully reconsiders Norwegian whaling politics.

WHALING IN NORWAY 2009

The animal welfare issue

The Norwegian government has set a quota of 885 Minke whales for 2009. Norway has previously presented data to the IWC stating that 20% of hunted whales do not die instantly. Norway claims to have one of the best animal welfare laws in the world, which amongst other things states that "animals must be killed in a way which ensures that the animals are not exposed to unnecessary suffering", yet Norwegian policy allows for one in five hunted whales to be exposed to potential suffering.

Allowing whales to be exposed to unnecessary suffering is inconsistent with Norwegian law.

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Struggling market for whale meat verses “tradition”

Whalers are clearly dissatisfied with the market situation of whale meat in Norway. Profitability is sinking and the market is struggling. Attempts have been made to stimulate the industry by increasing overseas exports, but the home market has clearly been expressed as the most important for the whaling industry. Whale meat is forced to compete with the other more abundant and consistently available products and is clearly struggling with the challenge. Norway is a progressive country with well functioning food-supply chains. No region of the country suffers from a lack of access to regular food supplies.

The argument that the whaling industry is an important industry and tradition for the Norwegian people is no longer holding – it is time for Norway to take part in the changing times and acknowledge society’s trends.

“Whales are eating our fish”: The ecosystem excuse

One of the main arguments with which the government uses to defend the whaling industry in Norway is the need to balance the marine ecosystem. In a fishing nation such as Norway, this has quickly led to fear for the fish stocks.

“Whales are eating our fish” - this form of propaganda has quickly taken root within the fisheries sector in Norway. Fishermen, whalers and sealers alike are using marine mammals as scapegoats for problems within the industry, claiming that whales (and seals) should be killed in order to allow greater yields for commercial fisheries. Norwegian researchers funded by the Norwegian government have themselves admitted that their results show no indication of any increase in commercially fishing species if they reduce the whale populations.

It is time the Norwegian government actively seek to right this misunderstanding within the fisheries sector.

While the complexity of the marine ecosystem and the role whales play in it becomes more apparent, there is also a growing awareness of the other anthropogenic threats whales are exposed to. Apart from the direct threat from hunting, whales in Norwegian waters are also subject to the effects of human-generated sound. The anthropogenic sounds of primary concern in Norway include those associated with dredging and construction, oil and gas drilling, geophysical surveys, sonars, transportation, explosions, and oceanographic research. Whale hunters themselves have noticed serious behavioural changes in the whales as well as changes in migration patterns and feeding locations.

Action needs to be taken to reduce all welfare threats to whales in Norwegian waters.

The Blue Box: Inadequate welfare data and dissatisfied whalers

In 2006 inspectors on Norwegian whaling boats were replaced by a trip-recorder, the so-called blue box. The purpose of this change was to enable a longer hunting season and relieve the constraints the use of an inspector demands. Unfortunately this has resulted in the diminished collection of data related to the welfare of the hunted whales. Norwegian whalers have themselves expressed dissatisfaction as to the functioning of the blue box. They have also complained of the expenses involved in the installation and maintenance of the blue box.

It is time for the Norwegian government to re-evaluate the surveillance of Norwegian whale hunting. It is also time for Norway to present full up-to-date welfare data-sets to the IWC.

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