



Take a Stand for Whales, not Whaling

Enforcing the Moratorium on Commercial Whaling

By Mark Henry

Whaling is an ancient practice that is steeped in tradition and historically very valuable to many cultures. In the past century, however, the populations of many whale species have hit record lows.¹ During this time, the populations of blue whales, fin whales, and humpback whales have decreased by an estimated 75-99% due to commercial whaling.¹

Once it became evident that the populations of many whales were declining so dramatically that whaling itself would not be possible without some sort of conservation effort, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) was formed in 1949.¹ After several failed attempts to facilitate population recoveries, the 37 nations that made up the IWC by the 1980s agreed that whaling must be banned to allow whale populations to recover.¹ The International Whaling Commission (established in 1949) passed a proposal for a complete ban on commercial whaling in the early 1980s, which came into effect in 1986.¹

This measure was by far the most effective action taken by the IWC to help whale populations grow globally.¹ However, since this moratorium on whaling came into effect, some nations within the IWC have refused to stop whaling and have continuously violated the ban. These nations include Norway, Iceland, and Japan.¹ These nations collectively have killed over 31,000 whales since the imposition of the moratorium and have either issued formal objections to the mandate or covered up their whaling operations with the guise of "research whaling".²

Because whales take a very long time to reach sexual maturity and have low fecundity, the populations of certain whales have remained severely low even after the moratorium on whaling was implemented.³ For example, global blue whale populations are still at around 1% of their pre-whaling levels despite around 30 years of protection.¹ For this reason, the refusal of even three countries to discontinue whaling poses substantial threats to these species.

The extinction of threatened whale species would mean the loss of some of the most impressive, mysterious, and intelligent animals on the planet.⁴ Losing any species of whale would be a true failure on the part of humanity.

For this reason, the current moratorium on commercial whaling is necessary for the recovery of certain endangered whale species and the nations currently violating the moratorium should be condemned. It is recommended that the nations forming the IWC impose penalties such as trade sanctions on the nations that continue to ignore the moratorium on whaling. Trade sanctions, particularly on seafood, would force these nations to reconsider their seafaring practices and would be particularly constraining for nations like Japan, the biggest importer of seafood in the world, and Norway, one of the world's top exporters of seafood.⁵

References

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