



News In Brief



Canadian Seal Skin Recommendation Cancelled

Greenland's Home Rule Government cancelled its recommendation of 6 January to put a stop on purchases of Canadian seal skin. Purchases in Greenland, which supplement Greenlandic skins, were running 10 per cent below the 2005 level. In a press release, the government stated: "The use of seals as a resource is widely based on economically and biologically sustainable principles, for which reason it is recommended that buying Canadian skins should be allowed again. It is also paramount that Greenland and Canada join forces to maintain and develop seal hunting in remote coastal communities where alternative income opportunities are limited." ■

Bear Visits Germany

A wild bear was spotted in Germany for the first time since 1835, according to the BBC. Despite initially receiving a warm welcome, state officials decided it should be captured or killed after it mauled several sheep in Bavaria. It is believed that the bear returned to Austria. ■



Vets Reject Animal Welfare Alliance

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) scrapped plans to send a joint letter to Congress with the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). The two groups had planned to promote animal welfare issues together. The AVMA represents more than 73,000 veterinarians across the USA. ■

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The Right to be an Enforcer

Editorial by Eugene Lapointe



All littoral sovereign states have the responsibility to ensure that harvests of marine resources within their Exclusive Economic Zones are legal and sustainable. This is not only for the benefit of people in the states, but also for the future of their resource base.

The European Union has made genuine attempts to promote marine conservation in the Mediterranean Sea. However, some member nations are perhaps not adequately following up on their responsibilities to enforce EU bans on driftnet use, or to consistently check on quotas landed for tuna, an increasingly scarce resource.

So we now have a situation where Greenpeace has been confiscating driftnets and reporting over quota landings of tuna in the Mediterranean. Why would any government or inter-governmental body allow a non-governmental organization to perform this duty when it had already agreed to enforce quotas and driftnet bans? Clearly, there is something dysfunctional in the organizational structure of nations when basic government oversight and enforcement is not being carried out.

All Greenpeace or any other NGO should be allowed to do is act - peacefully - as a deterrent by observing and recording unsustainable, illegal fishing activity and then passing over the information to national law enforcement agencies. But in the case of pair trawling in the English Channel, NGO vessels harassed fishing boats, endangering themselves and all the crews. The pair trawlers were acting legally - no fines were subsequently levied - and no vessels were stopped from pursuing this activity, which the campaigners claimed was wasteful of the fish resource and those marine mammals that got in the way of the operation.

The only benefit was to the reputation of the NGO, whose constituents, it must be presumed, approved of their "direct" actions. But this type of NGO action does not benefit active conservation and does not promote the sustainable use of marine resources. Since the pair trawling was legal, government inaction regarding the NGO harassment of the trawlers was clearly inappropriate. Warnings to NGOs over their behavior have historically proven ineffective in preventing further dangerous activities at sea.

The 2005-06 disruption of legal scientific research whaling in the Antarctic by Greenpeace and Sea Shepherd vessels was an illegal and dangerous intervention on the high seas by NGOs whose behavior is likely to be repeated in the coming season. Both Greenpeace and Sea Shepherd vessels caused disruption and damage to a legally operating Japanese research operation. Governments whose behavior supports such action might consider their legal position.

Sea Shepherd justifies its actions in the media by arguing that, despite all the evidence and legal opinion to the contrary, in its view all whaling is illegal. But the reality is that we cannot take drastic actions just because we alone chose to "interpret" laws in a particular way. Jails are full of people who have made the same mistake.

In the absence of common decency and restraint from dangerous behavior, NGO crews that act independently in a piratical manner on the high seas against any legally operating vessel, must be restrained. Perhaps the national authority of their country of origin or ship registry should then be requested to assist in determination of responsibility for their behavior. Until such action is taken and tested in recognized courts of law, states will continue to experience these tests of their sovereign authority to enforce legal behavior in matters of conservation as well as in matters of unauthorized or criminal behavior.

NGOs can be a helpful force in raising international awareness of illegal activities that should be stopped for the common good. However, it is solely within the realm of responsibility of sovereign states or intergovernmental

bodies of such states, to actually enforce whatever law applies to each situation. The growth of “big international NGOs” (BINGOs) in the last fifty years is a new social phenomenon. States have few historical prece-

dents for dealing with them and need to develop operational rules for doing so in order that state authority and global order is not usurped or degraded by dilettantes on the high seas. ■

Capelin for the Masses

Eastern Newfoundland inshore fishermen are worried. Their capelin fishery season was limited by regulators to two days, despite the sightings of “a huge biomass of capelin” in near-shore waters.

The Newfoundland Labrador Provincial management authority and Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans are working together to keep the spring capelin fishery “conservative” as part of a scheme to rebuild cod stocks. Therefore, fishermen who needed to land capelin in order to pay their bills found their season closed after only two days. Many are finding that the costs of fuel and loans on their boats are so high that each season is vitally important, and some are grumbling that the government is trying to run them out of the fishery, in an attempt to cut down on total landings capacity.



Fishermen reported that some large herds of harp seals were still in their waters, instead of having migrated back north to the Arctic. Large pods of minke and humpback whales also thronged the east coast, gulping tons of capelin. The seals and whales recognize no closed fishing seasons, and capelin schools are a favorite forage for them.

The capelin is a small, silvery and greenish fish that is also a vitally important food of Atlantic cod, a species that has been scarce in the last decade. Fishing for the cod has been halted in an effort to rebuild stocks. To complicate matters in this part of the western Atlantic, the harp seal population has grown enormously since 1983, when the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) orchestrated a petition drive in Europe that resulted in a ban on the import of the products of seals under the age of one year. This resulted in an effective halt to the seal hunt in Canada and Norway for nearly two decades.

Because of this animal rights campaign success, the harp seal population in Canadian waters rose from 1.8 million animals in 1983 to well over 5 million in 2005. The government of Canada has done its best to cut down on the herd since finding new markets for pelts in China and Russia. However, the damage to Canada's marine ecosystem has been extensive and long lasting. Seals gorged on capelin, while cod, also over-fished by people, found fewer capelin to feed their dwindling stocks. Because minke and humpback whales are virtually unhunted in the waters off Canada, their own increased stocks are also having a significant impact on the capelin, and ultimately, on the recovery of the cod.

Capelin are a basic part of the marine food chain that will undoubtedly continue to receive increased protection by government agencies, regardless of the current desperate needs of human fishermen to take a share of this resource. There are few simple answers to the problems that have culminated in over abundance of seals and whales, and coincident increasing scarcity of fish on several trophic levels. All predators of the resources of the sea will have to adapt to these new conditions for years to come. ■

Changes in the Waters

Norway's spring hunt for minke whales has been negatively affected by bad weather and the take so far has been only 444 animals. Although the season goes through August, a yearly total of only some 500 animals is expected to be landed. The minke whale quota for Norwegian hunters this year was set at 1052.

There may be other reasons for the poor take. A spokesperson for the whalers has said that capelin, a main forage food for minke whales, is scarce this season. It is therefore assumed that the minkes have followed their food to wherever it has moved in the north Atlantic, or that the whales have found other small forage fish in other areas, thus taking themselves out of the traditional hunting range of Norwegian whalers.

A similar experience with a very bad whaling season was reported from the north slope of Alaska. There, Inupiat hunters could not get out to search for the huge bowhead whales that migrate past their shores each spring. The sea was full of thick chunks of multi-year polar ice that had broken up near the North Pole and had blown south to on-shore locations off Barrow and other whaling villages.

Whaling captain George Ahmaogak reported that such thick moving ice had not been seen in living memory, and only a handful of whales could be found and brought to shore. He hoped that the return migration in the fall would take place in better sea conditions so that villages could take their traditional food and make up for the spring shortfall.



Men, fish and whales in the northern hemisphere are all experiencing differences in local conditions and in the currents that pass by large land masses. In some areas of the north Atlantic, warmer sea temperatures are making a difference in fish fry survival, in the amount and kinds of plankton that are available at the lowest levels of the food chain, and consequently, in the survival and abundance of creatures all the way up to the top of the prey-predator scale.

It seems that intellect and collective ingenuity will have to find solutions to different local problems as people in Norway, Newfoundland and Alaska look to the sea for other ways to find resources and to keep their economies viable. ■

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Fish Earnings Rise

The Fish and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations reported that the value of international fish trade has increased from \$15.5 billion in 1980 to over \$71 billion in 2004, with developing countries seeing net earnings rise from \$4.6 billion to over \$20 billion. Aquaculture accounts for nearly one-third of global fisheries.

Grimur Valdimarsson, Director of FAO's Fisheries Industry Division said: "The fish trade helps poor countries shore up their food security situation. But increasing international demand can at times result in excessive fishing pressure, leading to the over-fishing and wasteful use of stocks. Meeting demand must be balanced with sustainable management if developing countries want to continue to benefit this way."

Around 200 million people worldwide earn all or part of their living from the fisheries sector and related sectors.

The FAO announced that it is establishing a mechanism through which it will provide CITES with technical recommendations to help it make decisions on the need for trade restrictions. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) has become increasingly involved in fisheries issues.

Meanwhile, some fisheries advocates are getting tired of allegations that fish stocks are in peril. Nils Stolpe, Communications Director of the Garden State Seafood Association criticized the Pew Charitable Trusts for investing tens of millions of



dollars "into efforts to convince anyone who will listen that fishing is the ruination of the world's oceans."

Stolpe argues that Pew funding would be better used to help develop cleaner fishing techniques, research improved fishing gear, and collect more data. Instead, he says, the U.S. Department of Commerce has to allot large portions of its budget to defend lawsuits against NGOs that are partially funded by Pew Charitable Trusts. (For more information visit www.fishingnj.org). ■

U.S. Activists take on National Security



As world tensions grow during a time of North Korean missile launches, Iranian threats against Israel and its supporters, and the uncertain future of world peace, animal rights activists got into the act by convincing a court to rule against the U.S. Navy as it attempted

to train thousands of military personnel during maneuvers at sea.

On July 3, U.S. District Court Judge Florence-Marie Cooper ordered the U.S. Navy to not use active sonar devices in training exercises in the Pacific off Hawaii. Judge Cooper

granted the request of the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC) to ban the use of sonar in underwater maneuvers near the recently created Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument.

The sonar is meant to detect the presence of enemy submarines that would otherwise slip by unnoticed, due to their development of "quiet" diesel engines and other stealth technology.

NRDC had filed a lawsuit in 2005 against the Navy regarding sonar use, claiming that the practice violates the National Environmental Policy Act.

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The specific complaint is that active sonar both interferes with the communication patterns of cetaceans, and also causes the animals physical damage, sometimes resulting in death. Injured whales and dolphins have been documented to have stranded on some occasions following the use of active sonar by Navy vessels in their vicinity.

Defense officials had sought to preempt the NRDC lawsuit through a move to grant an exemption to the Navy under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, but the NRDC convinced Judge Cooper to rule that another body of law, the National Environmental Policy Act, would be violated because of a lack of specific study regarding active sonar damage to cetaceans.

It appeared that joint military training maneuvers by naval forces from eight nations would be thwarted until a compromise “out of court settlement” was reached within days of the ruling. Under the compromise, the Navy agreed to conduct additional procedures that would consist of both visual and auditory “spotting” of whales in the vicinity, prior to turning on the sonar in submarine detection training exercises. The spotting would involve a certain number of sailors dedicated to actually looking for cetaceans in the area, from ships and planes, in addition to sailors posted to listen with underwater technology for evidence that cetaceans were in the vicinity.

According to the July 8 *San Diego Times*, Rear Adm. James Symonds, the Navy's director of environmental

readiness, in announcing the settlement, said it was “critically important that we have been able to turn active sonar on” for the rest of the exercise. Under the agreement, the Navy also promised not to use the sonar within 25 miles of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument, which was recently established by President Bush as a nature preserve. The exercise did not cover the area of the new Monument.

This litigation is likely to serve as a warning to American leaders that even national security does not necessarily trump environmental concerns. No amount of demonstrated danger to the United States is apparently serious enough to cause the leadership of the NRDC to back off from filing lawsuits. ■



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