



## Iceland Resumes Commercial Whaling

Iceland announced that it is resuming limited commercial whaling and harvested the first of nine fin whales that it says it will take, along with thirty minke whales, in the year up to the end of August 2007. Regional populations of the species are around 25,000 and 43,000 respectively.

While the announcement was criticized by some politicians in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, the reaction was relatively measured in the United States. Commerce Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez said he was “disappointed” by the decision.

Eugene Lapointe, President of IWMC, said: “Iceland will take such a tiny number of whales that you would have to be delusional to argue the hunt could have any negative long-term impact on whale stocks. The hunt is clearly sustainable and fully justified.”

Mr. Lapointe dismissed statements of condemnation from animal rights groups and politicians in anti-whaling countries, who are protesting Iceland’s decision. “Opponents argue that there is an insufficient demand for whale meat. If they are right, how can they be concerned that whales could be over exploited? The fact is, it is for the fishermen, not animal rights campaigners, to decide whether to invest



in hunting whales and it is for the Icelandic government to regulate catches.”

He added: “You have to wonder about the true motivations of opponents of sustainable whaling. Criticizing whaling countries seems to have become a means of diverting attention from environmental and political problems at home, while animal rights campaigns appear to be designed to maximize fundraising possibilities.”

Attention is now likely to focus on the role of the International Whaling Commission (IWC), the body that is supposed to regulate catches of whales. Most whale hunting, while sustainable, takes place outside of its direct control.

Mr. Lapointe said: “It is the anti-whaling countries and animal rights groups that have hamstrung the IWC and prevented it from doing its job. Iceland set a reasonable target date for the IWC to establish a management system but the usual suspects thought they could be clever and delay progress forever. They were wrong. When you equivocate endlessly, the world has a tendency to move on without you.”

IWMC believes whales will be properly protected only when an internationally agreed management system is put in place. ■

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# Why Iceland Is Right To Whale

Editorial by Eugene Lapointe



**A**nti-whaling members of the IWC and animal rights groups are howling in protest at Iceland's decision to resume whaling. What are they so upset about?

In the first place, it should be said that from a conservation viewpoint, which is our major concern, this decision will have no negative bearing on overall stocks of fin whales and minke whales in the North Atlantic. Both types of whale are so abundant that such a small harvest is nothing to get really concerned about.

Could it lead to the over-exploitation of whales in the future? Absolutely not. The present market for whale meat is miniscule compared to the historic market for whale oil that was the cause of population declines. The world no longer desires whales for their oil.

Is it cruel? Most whales harvested by Icelandic fishermen die quickly. Moreover, it is generally accepted that wild animals lead better lives than the farmed ones we breed and eat so readily. And surely it is no more or less moral to eat abundant whale than abundant lamb.

So why is Iceland's decision being characterized in catastrophic terms? The move is entirely legal since Iceland is not bound by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) moratorium on commercial whaling. Iceland recorded an objection to this regulation when it joined. And Iceland, Japan and Norway also have long-standing reservations against the CITES trade ban on certain whale products and are all therefore free to import and export whale meat.

Iceland said it would resume commercial whaling in 2006 if no progress was made on the Revised Management Scheme (RMS) and those negotiations collapsed earlier this year. Had the IWC agreed a management system, Iceland would most likely now be whaling within quotas set by member states. Needless to say, the countries and groups that are now protesting Iceland's decision are precisely those that have done the most to stymie the introduction of a management scheme.

No, what opponents are most annoyed about is their own impotence. They do not have the power or means to stop Iceland, Norway or Japan from hunting whales. They have destroyed the very vehicle that would allow them to influence whale catches and their only recourse is to lecture and insult whaling nations in the glare of their own media. Reality hurts. Hence the howls.

But Iceland's announcement is a victory for those who support the principle of sustainable use. Iceland has a sovereign right to hunt whales and is doing so in a carefully controlled manner.■

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## Of CITES, Elephants and People

The CITES Standing Committee has postponed a decision on proposed sales of elephant ivory from Botswana, Namibia and South Africa.

The Standing Committee met in early October to consider if the MIKE (monitoring of illegal killing of elephants) program data could establish a basis for determining that poaching is not encouraged by concurrent legal sales of ivory. The Committee could not agree whether the proposed sales would encourage illegal killing and will meet again to make a determination in late May in The Hague, Netherlands, just prior to the next COP, which takes place from 3-15 June.

The three countries want to be allowed to sell ivory for a number of reasons. Elephants can be dangerous, particularly in dense numbers when they damage homes, kill and injure people and destroy crops. It is very difficult to live in harmony with huge, hungry and fierce animals that need to find food in areas of increasing drought. A certain number of such animals are shot each year and their ivory is set aside for potential international sale. In other cases, some elephants die of natural causes. Their ivory is similarly set aside in the government ivory stockpile.

CITES is taking a long time to determine whether the international market for ivory encourages the illegal killing of elephants, as animal rights groups assert. The evidence



seems to increasingly suggest the opposite – that there would be fewer illegal kills in a well-regulated market.

Moreover, the overall conservation efforts of compliant governments would be enhanced if they could use the revenues from legal ivory sales for further conservation law enforcement, monitoring of illegal killing of elephants, and monitoring of trade.■

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## Alaskan Whale Quotas Under Review

Authorities in America have announced their intention to “Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the Establishment of Annual Quotas for the Subsistence Harvest of Bowhead Whales by Alaska Natives”.

A “public scoping period” is being established with public comments being called for. An Environmental Impact Statement on the effects of the proposed harvest of 510 bowheads over the next ten years will be published in April 2007.

These actions are all in accordance with federal law and are part of the usual procedure when proposals for future quotas are submitted. In late May of 2007, the annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) will be held in Anchorage, Alaska. The proposed renewed quota for bowhead whales will be considered by member states at that time. Ordinarily, the IWC reviews and acts upon, harvest quotas for the next five years.

The IWC says the western arctic population of bowhead whales has been increasing. In 2001 the “point estimate” of the population was 10,500 animals, and the estimate of the population within a 95% confidence range of accuracy was that there are between 8,200 and 13,500 animals in that

stock. Bowhead whales have continued to recover well from the days of industrialized oil whaling. The population continues to thrive and to migrate between the western and eastern arctic waters of North America, while simultaneously being taken in small numbers for food by subsistence hunters of Alaska and eastern Russia. This subsistence harvest amounts to less than 1% of the total stock and does not constitute a threat to them.

Alaskan Eskimo communities have at least a 2,000 year-old tradition of taking bowhead whales for food and regard the hunts as essential to their culture, ethnic identity, sense of well being, and nutritional state. Such food is far superior, in their opinion, to anything that could be imported to Alaska from elsewhere in the world. There is well-documented biological evidence that the harvest does no harm to the stock.

This past spring season, the seas off western and Northern Alaska were unusually choked with huge chunks of multi-year polar ice; this together with unfavorable winds caused one of the poorest whaling seasons in the last 40 years. Alaskans are hoping for better weather and a renewed bowhead quota in 2007 ■



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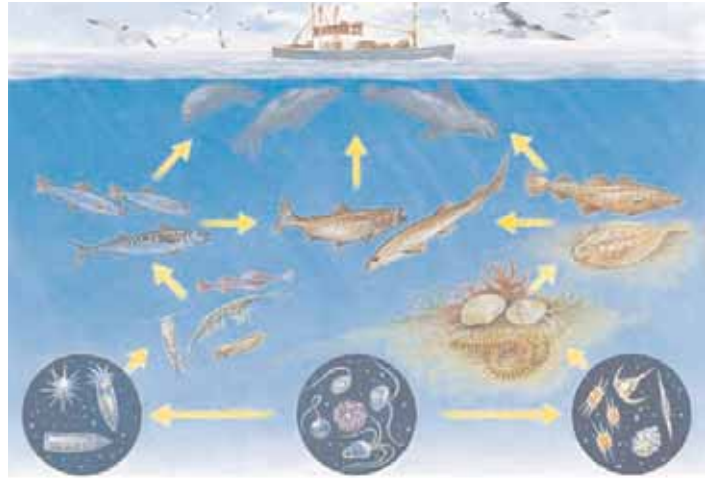
## Former FWS Official Criticizes MMPA, IWC Philosophy

Former U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) biologist, Jim Beers, has said that anti-use groups are wrong when it comes to defining the causes of diminished fish stocks in the USA.

According to Beers, “ninety species of whales, porpoises and dolphins enjoy sacred status” under the U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and are wreaking havoc on the entire marine ecosystem.

Humans are “managed” in this system through laws and quotas on their fishing behavior. Marine mammals, he argues, are currently “unmanaged” because they are not culled in U.S. waters, and therefore their populations grow unimpeded at the expense of their prey – the fish that both they and people utilize. Ecosystems are a complex web of inter-relationships that must all complement each other so that catastrophic changes in the relative proportions of species do not take place.

Beers points out that the MMPA, which forbids any take or harassment of marine mammals, would have been better devised as the Marine Mammal Management Act.



*“Over protection of a given species can be as damageable for the ecosystem as the over exploitation”*

He points out that commercial fish stocks cannot be recovered when “6 to 8 million (a conservative estimate) of these animals, many weighing tons, reproduce like mice as they eat more and more plankton and bait fish and young and old breeding commercial fish needed to recover ocean fisheries.” ■

## Germany Ban Seal Imports

The German Parliament has voted to ban imports of seal products. Under intense lobbying by the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), officials are now planning to urge that the ban be extended to the rest of the European Union. Germany takes over the Presidency of the EU in 2007. ■



## Obituary

IWMC was recently informed of the sudden death of Bertrands de Clercs. We knew Bertrand for many years. Though we had too few occasions to meet, our meetings, like our telephone conversations, were always moments of happiness. All our exchanges were instructive, friendly and often tinted with humor. We will remember Bertrands and all those moments with great fondness