



HUMANE SOCIETY
INTERNATIONAL



14 April 2020

Truls Konow
Kristin Skurtveit
Fartøy- og deltakerseksjonen
Fiskeridirektoratet
Røysegata 15
6003 ÅLESUND
Norge

Re: 20/3592 Høring av endringer i konsesjonsforskriften og strukturkvoteforskriftene - økt deltakelse i hvalfangsten 19.03.2020

Dear Section Director Konow and Senior Advisor Skurtveit,

On behalf of the Animal Welfare Institute, Environmental Investigation Agency, Humane Society International, OceanCare, ProWildlife and WDC-Whale and Dolphin Conservation, animal protection and conservation organizations representing millions of citizens worldwide, I am writing to express our opposition to the proposals to amend the current Norwegian whaling regulations to allow (1) for the owner **or** one or more of the crew to have experience in whaling in one of the last six years and/or (2) allow boats that have been removed from the list of structural quota-approvals for other fisheries to apply for a whaling permit as long as the vessel will only engage in minke whaling. These changes would significantly weaken the regulation of whaling in Norway, cause increased suffering for hunted whales and threaten crew safety.

Even the most advanced whaling methods cannot guarantee an instantaneous death or ensure that all struck animals are swiftly rendered insensible to pain and distress before they die, as is the generally accepted standard for farm animals.¹ Given that whales are only visible for a short period when they surface to breathe, the thorax (the initial target) and the brain (the proposed location for a secondary rifle shot when the initial harpoon fails to kill a whale) offer only small, briefly accessible targets for a gunner standing on a moving platform on a shifting sea, often under difficult weather and sea conditions.

¹WDCS and WSPA. 2008. Whaling: defying international commitments to animal welfare? 8 pp. Norway is a member of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), which has adopted strict standards for animal welfare, including slaughter. Briefing available at <https://uk.whales.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2018/08/whaling-commitments-to-animal-welfare.pdf>.

The International Whaling Commission defines humane killing of a whale as “causing its death without pain, stress or distress perceptible to the animal. That is the ideal. Any humane killing technique aims first to render an animal insensitive to pain as swiftly as is technically possible”.²

We are deeply concerned that the Directorate is willing to accept that only one person on board a vessel would need to have whaling experience, and even then, only in one of the last six years. Ishikawa (2003) noted that times to death and instantaneous death rates for new gunners on Japanese whaling vessels were worse on average than for experienced gunners.³ Further, improved firing accuracy has been linked to gunner knowledge.⁴ Gunner experience, when combined with sea and weather conditions, the size of the whale, the distance fired and the location and angle of the grenade’s penetration all influence the accuracy of the kill and the time the whale takes to die.⁵ Neither the current regulations nor the proposed are sufficient to guarantee a humane death for the whales being hunted. Further, they pose a risk to the safety of the harpooners themselves. Inexperienced gunners not only can cause increased times to death for whales, they are subject to possible misfiring of the grenade harpoon.⁶

We also oppose the proposed removal of the current requirement that experience be linked to the actual vessel intending to engage in whaling. Individual vessels behave very differently at sea, and knowledge of how a boat reacts to varying sea states and speeds would seem to be a necessary component of a humane hunt.

We have additional concerns regarding the welfare of whales killed in the Norwegian hunt. For example, the harpooner training program does not adequately reflect real life conditions⁷ nor are the courses held on an annual basis.⁸ Further, there is no mandatory reporting of times to death (TTD) or instantaneous death rates (IDR).⁹ Although data has been gathered on TTD, the information came from reviews by fisheries inspectors or even the whalers themselves. This runs counter to recommendations that data collectors should be independent, designated, competent persons who do not have other tasks to attend to in the killing and flensing of whales. Given these criteria, the best candidates are veterinarians, large mammal biologists and whale physiologists, with fisheries inspectors being the least recommended.¹⁰

² Report of the Workshop on Humane Killing Techniques for Whales. Presented to the 33rd meeting of the IWC as paper IWC/33/15.

³ Ishikawa, H. 2003. Report on Whale Killing Methods in the 2002/2003 JARPA and improvement of the time to death in the Japanese Whale Research Programs (JARPA and JARPN). Submitted by Japan to the IWC Workshop on Whale Killing Methods, Berlin June 7-9, 2003. IWC/55/WK25.

⁴ Ishikawa, H. 2005. JAPAN: Progress Report on the Killing Method of Whales in the Second Phase of Japanese Whale Research Program in the Antarctic Sea (JARPAII) and Northwestern Pacific Ocean (JARPNII).

⁵ Brakes, P., Butterworth, A., Simmonds, M. and Lymbery, P. (2004). *Troubled Waters*. Chapter 5: The IWC and whale welfare. p.30-36 and Chapter 8: Weather, sea condition and ship motions affecting accuracy in whaling. p. 63-68. WSPA Publication ISBN Number: ISBN 0-9547065-0-1.

⁶ <https://nammco.no/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/manual-baleen-whales-grenade-and-harpoon.pdf>

⁷ Brakes, per supranote 4.

⁸ <https://www.fiskeridir.no/Yrkesfiske/Nyheter/2017/0317/Inviter-til-kurs-for-an-aa-rets-hvalfangst>

⁹ NAMMCO. (2018). Overview of Marine Mammal Hunting Methods, Inc. National Regulations, Monitoring/Observation in NAMMCO Member Countries.

¹⁰ NAMMCO Expert Group Meeting on Assessing TTD data from Large Whale Hunts. The NAMMCO expert group noted that the profession of the veterinarians enables them to “better understand and assess the behaviour of the animal when hit, and relate the animal’s reaction to the death criteria, and it is assumed that large mammal biologists and physiologist also have this understanding.” 4 -6 November 2015, Copenhagen, Denmark

With regard to the electronic recording system (ferdskriver or blåboks) which has effectively replaced the use of inspectors on board whaling vessels, we are concerned that this mechanism does not record time to death for every whale shot. Rather, the blåboks records time and position of every whale shot and taken on board for flensing. It has been noted by experts that this only “may” give an indication as to whether the whale died quickly or slowly.¹¹

We do not support the idea that vessels that have been withdrawn from fishing through removal from the structural quota schemes should be allowed to engage in whaling. As noted in the proposal, these vessels are consistently “the oldest and least efficient vessels within the individual groups in the deep sea fishing fleet and coastal fishing fleet”. Allowing such vessels to engage in whaling at the time when the Norwegian government is actively seeking to reduce the carbon footprint and pollution output of ships is not only a contradiction, it is unnecessary.

As indicated in the proposal, the number of whaling vessels has declined, as has the number of whales killed. This reflects falling demand for whale meat in Norway.¹² Rather than seeking to expand the whaling fleet, and loosen regulations, we believe that Norway should acknowledge that whaling is no longer a necessary industry and stop issuing quotas in defiance of the IWC’s moratorium.

We are also concerned that the comment period provided for this issue was less than a month, despite the fact that normal comment periods are longer. The bias toward the industry, rather than a full consideration and discussion of welfare concerns in the Directorate’s approach to this issue was made clear with the statement that the shortened time frame was chosen given that the whaling season opened on April 1st.

Thank you in advance for considering this input on the proposed amendments to Norway’s whaling regulations. These amendments are not necessary or justified and, if implemented, would serve only to increase the suffering of whales killed in Norway’s hunt and threaten the safety of crew members. In regard to crew safety, we would also like to take this opportunity to ask whether and how the whaling industry is ensuring that its vessels and processing facilities are compliant with Norway’s social distancing rules in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,



Susan Millward,
Director, Marine Animal Program
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¹¹ Per supranote 8

¹² <https://uk.whales.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/10/norway-whaling-whalemeat-attitudes-survey-2019.pdf> The poll showed that only 4 percent of Norwegians eat whale meat “often,” while two-thirds either didn’t eat it at all or did so “a long time ago.” In the 18-29 age group no one said they ate whale meat often, while 75 percent said they never ate it or only did so a long time ago.