

ECO

International Whaling Commission Annual Meeting

In this issue ...

- **Ecocide at Sea**
- **To Whale or Not**
- **Cod is Dead**
- **On the Bridge**

Whale Meat Proves Too Toxic to Eat

Every whaling nation (of which there are really only two), it seems, is suddenly confronted with one of the hard realities of modern science—increasingly, whales (which are at the top of the marine food chain) are contaminated with high levels of mercury, PCBs, and other pollutants.

Unfit to eat?

Norwegian scientists and health

officials have issued a stern advisory to pregnant women and breast-feeding mothers to avoid eating whale meat

due to high levels of mercury.

At the same time, Japanese scientists from the Health Sciences University of Hokkaido have

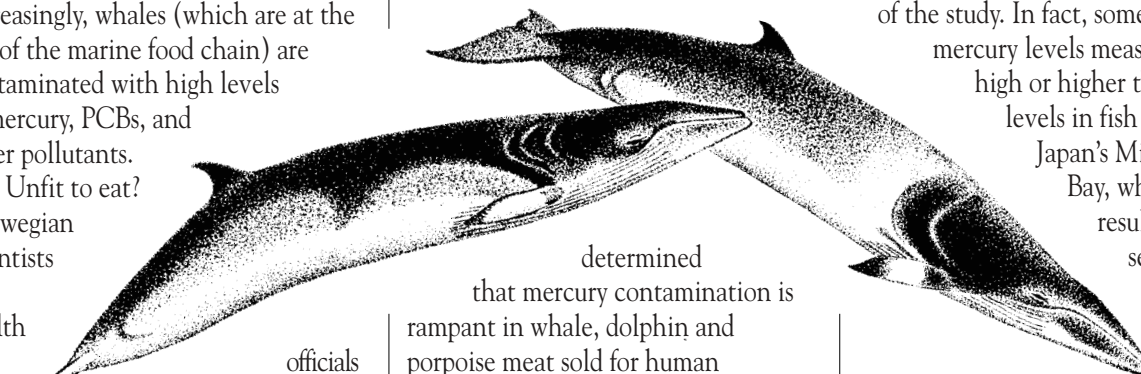
determined that mercury contamination is rampant in whale, dolphin and porpoise meat sold for human consumption in that country. In some cases, mercury contamination registered more than 200 times the maximum value allowed by the

Japanese government's safety limits.

"Despite extreme contamination with mercury, toothed whale products have been sold for human consumption without any regulation," stated Dr. Tetsuya Endo, lead author of the study. In fact, some of the

mercury levels measured are as high or higher than the levels in fish eaten in Japan's Minamata Bay, which resulted in a

severe health crisis for fishermen, and for hundreds of children born with major birth defects in the 1950s and early 1960s. *concluded on page four*



Iceland Agonizes Over Whaling

The saga of Icelandic whaling ambitions has once again collided with political and economic realities: Will a resumption of whale-killing bring down upon Iceland the wrath of international opinion and another costly boycott of Icelandic fish?

An intense debate has swept across the remote island nation like a fierce winter storm. The issue exploded in January when Prime Minister David Oddson declared during a trip to Japan that he would support a resumption of whaling, reversing his years of quiet opposition. The Japanese government, notorious for offering

valuable inducements to small nations for their support of whaling, apparently made Oddson an offer he could not refuse.

Now the people of Iceland must weigh the costs of whaling. Already, two major industries have spoken out forcefully against it. The vital fishing industry, which accounts for half of Iceland's exports, reemphasized its long-held opposition. The industry suffered massive losses in the late 1980s when an international boycott against Icelandic fish caused its major customers, such as McDonald's and Burger King, the giant fast-food chains, to cancel all contracts. During

the IWC meeting in Reykjavik in 1992, the Icelandic fishing industry had a booth outside the meeting hall where it distributed anti-whaling information.

The Iceland Tourist Industry Association warned at its annual meeting in April that there should be no resumption of whaling without "consultation and acceptance with the international community." Any whaling that undermines the IWC moratorium would be "interpreted as an act of pirate whaling and would cause great damage to the Icelandic tourist industry," stated the Association.

Icelandair, the national airline *concluded on page three*

The Fisheries Eco-Catastrophe

As we debate the fate of the whales, let us not ignore the plight of the marine fishes. Recent scientific reports paint a grim picture: the oceans are now nearly empty of the large fishes, and all marine ecosystems are suffering from overfishing, destruction of habitat and pollution. We have ravaged our planet's last frontier.

Since its inception in 1947, the

ECO

ECO is published on the occasion of the 55th Annual Meeting of the International Whaling Commission by:

American Cetacean Society

Animal Welfare Institute

Campaign Whale

Canadian Marine Environment Protection Society

Cetacean Society International

Cousteau Society

Dolphin Connection

Earth Island Institute

Environmental Investigation Agency

Earthtrust

ECCEA

Greenpeace

Humane Society International

The Humane Society of the US

International Fund for Animal Welfare

International Wildlife Coalition

Orcalab/Pacific Orca Society

Robin des Bois

RSPCA

Swiss Coalition for the Protection of Whales

Swiss Working Group for the

Protection of Marine Mammals

World Wide Fund for Nature

ECO is funded entirely by nongovernmental contributions. The views expressed may not be those of each ECO sponsor. ECO is available from Earth Island Institute, 300 Broadway, San Francisco, CA 94133, or <http://www.earthisland.org/>

IWC has presided over the devastation of seven of the ten species of great whales. This sorry story has been well documented, particularly in recent years when the extent of illegal whaling by the Soviet Union, Japan and other nations has been exposed.

Now the plundering of the great fishes over the past half-century is being exposed by scientists examining catch statistics. It is a shameful record, a great crime against nature.

The biomass of large predatory fishes—tunas, swordfish, billfishes, codfishes, flatfishes, sharks, skates and rays—has fallen to only about 10 percent of pre-industrial levels, according to a study published 15 May in the scientific journal *Nature*. The study, *Rapid Worldwide Depletion of Predatory Fish Communities*, by Ransom A. Myers and Boris Worm of the biology department of Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, is a damning indictment of fisheries management. ECO presents the summary of the study for the information of all IWC attendees:

Serious concerns have been raised about the ecological effects of industrialized fishing, spurring a United Nations resolution on restoring fisheries and marine ecosystems to healthy levels. However, a prerequisite for restoration is a general understanding of the composition and abundance of unexploited fish communities, relative to contemporary ones.

We constructed trajectories of community biomass and composition of large predatory fishes in four continental shelf and nine oceanic systems, using all available data from the beginning of exploitation. Industrialized fisheries typically reduced community biomass by 80% within 15 years of exploitation. Compensatory increases in fast-growing species were observed, but often reversed within a decade.

Using a meta-analytic approach, we estimate that large predatory fish biomass today is only about 10% of pre-industrial levels. We conclude that declines of large predators in coastal regions have extended throughout the global ocean, with potentially serious consequences for ecosystems. Our analysis suggests that management based on recent data alone may be misleading, and provides minimum estimates for unexploited communities, which could serve as the 'missing baseline' needed for future restoration efforts.

The best data on the fisheries in oceanic ecosystems came from the Japanese pelagic longlining fleet from 1952 to 1999. "Pelagic longlines are the most widespread fishing gear, and the Japanese fleet the most widespread longline operation, covering all oceans except the circumpolar seas," the study explains. "Longlines, which resemble long, baited transects, catch a wide range of species in a consistent way and over vast spacial scales." Catch per 100 hooks was graphed over decades in nine oceanic areas. All showed similar sharp declines indicating decimation of fish stocks. Similar declines in biomass were found in four shelf fisheries.

Just as high seas driftnets ravaged the oceans in the 1980's – until the United Nations banned them in the early 1990s – the pelagic longline industry is now wiping out the last of the big fish and non-target wildlife such as sea turtles and sea birds. More than 5 million baited hooks are set out each day from thousands of longline boats. Some the lines can be as long as 60 miles (some 100 kilometers) with 2,000 hooks. The huge leatherback sea turtle is racing toward extinction because thousands are hooked and drowned on longlines each year. Millions of sea birds are also dying on the deadly hooks.

As the large, slow-growing fish
concluded on page four

Will Iceland Join the Whale Hunters?

With a highly-controversial vote at the interim meeting last fall, Iceland has rejoined the International Whaling Commission. But Iceland, violating the standards of international law, agreed to support the Convention only if it could also file a reservation in opposition to the key Whaling Moratorium adopted in 1982.

Fifteen nations have protested Iceland's adoption of such tactics. The United States recently filed an objection, as has New Zealand and Australia. In its objection, Germany

stated, "The Government of the Federal Republic of Germany is thus of the view that the reservation related to the moratorium raises doubts as to the full commitment of the Republic of Iceland to the object and purpose of the Convention. The Government of the Federal Republic of Germany therefore objects to the reservation made by the Republic of Iceland."

Various rumors have cropped up in the news. The country's whaling Commissioner, Stefan Asmundsson, claims Iceland will start a "scientific"

whale hunt as early as 2004, emulating Japan's notorious phony whaling scam, killing up to 100 fin and 50 sei whales in the North Atlantic (both protected by the IWC) and 100 additional minke.

Said Asmundsson, invoking those darn whale appetites, "It is no secret that we aim to restart commercial whaling in the future, and that that will have an important economic impact on various small fishing communities, but that is not what we are talking about now.

"The driving force behind this isn't so much the whaling as the
concluded on page four

Iceland, concluded from page one which funnels thousands of Europeans and North Americans through Iceland each day, attacked the whaling scheme as well. The carefully-crafted image of Iceland as "pure, natural, unspoiled" could be severely tarnished by images of harpooned whales and bloody waters.

The booming tourism industry cringed recently when Kristjan Loftsson, owner of the old whaling fleet, advocated bringing tourists to see the butchering of whales at his giant whaling station on the coast east of Reykjavik.

The Icelandic whale-watching industry, which has grown exponentially over the past decade to more than 90,000 foreign visitors in 2001, would be crippled like a harpooned whale if whaling resumes, operators warn. "We are afraid of what hunting will do to our business," says Vignir Sigursveinsson, manager of Elding Adventures.

"On our best days we can stop our engines and the whales come right up to us, not afraid," commented Sigursveinsson recently on board his boat, *Elding I*. "What happens when the boats they see

become hunters again?" A dozen whale-watching companies now operate out of coastal ports in Iceland, generating more than US\$8 million in revenue in 2001. By contrast, Loftsson's commercial whaling operation reported annual revenues of only \$3 million to \$4 million between 1986 and 1989, the last years of Iceland's whaling.

In addition to a consumer boycott of its fish exports, Iceland could face economic sanctions by the United States for any violation of IWC regulations. The Pelly Amendment to the Fishermen's Protective Act requires the U.S. to certify nations that "diminish the effectiveness of an international fisheries conservation agreement." Upon certification, the U.S. president is empowered to embargo any products from the offending nation. In addition to the fish boycott, an impending Pelly certification in 1989 helped convince Iceland to halt its illegal "scientific" whaling.

The U.S. has used the Pelly Amendment repeatedly over the past 35 years to encourage treaty compliance on fishing and whaling

issues. Denmark was compelled to stop its fleets from catching endangered U.S. and Canadian wild salmon off Greenland. Japan and the Soviet Union began complying with IWC whaling quotas in 1975 when President Ford threatened to embargo their fish. Spain, Portugal, Brazil, Chile, Peru and South Korea agreed to join the IWC and comply with quotas in the late 1970s under Pelly pressure, and Taiwan and Philippines shut down pirate whaling ships flying their flags. In the early 1990s, the U.N. ban on the deadly driftnets was enforced against Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Italy and other renegade fishing nations through pressure under the Pelly Amendment and a similar U.S. law, the High Seas Driftnet Enforcement Act.

Iceland faces a fateful choice. It can join Japan and Norway in defying international law and opinion, and suffer the consequences. Or it can abandon a dying industry and embrace new human values toward the whales, winning international acclaim. Prime minister Oddson, one of the world's more astute leaders, should lead his nation toward whale conservation and eco-tourism.

Toxic Whales, concluded from page one

Even at low concentrations, mercury can cause severe nerve damage. Fetuses and babies are particularly vulnerable.

The same Norwegian science panel that issued the mercury warning had recently determined that minke whale blubber was contaminated with high levels of deadly PCBs. PCBs are linked to birth defects and other health problems. Norwegians do not eat the blubber—only the meat of minke whales. Whalers

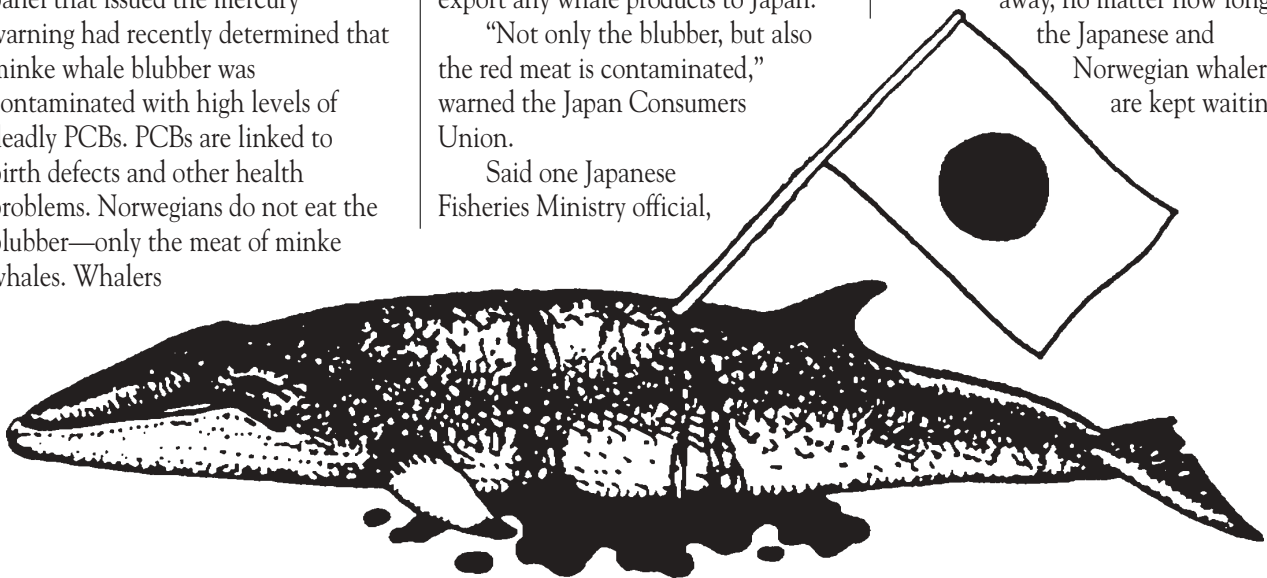
who had hoped to sell the Norwegian blubber have been keeping mountains of the stuff in cold storage, pending negotiations with Japan. However, the announcement of the blubber contamination has set back plans to export any whale products to Japan.

“Not only the blubber, but also the red meat is contaminated,” warned the Japan Consumers Union.

Said one Japanese Fisheries Ministry official,

quoted by Reuters: “Everything won’t just clear up quickly because the Norwegian Fisheries Minister is here. This will take time.”

But the PCBs and Mercury contamination will not go away, no matter how long the Japanese and Norwegian whalers are kept waiting.



Catastrophe, concluded from page one have disappeared, fishermen are moving to smaller, faster-growing fish. In some collapsing fisheries, says Jeremy Jackson, an ecologist at Scripps Institution of Oceanography, “jellyfish have become the commercial fishery because that’s all that’s left. That and the bacteria.”

The collapse of the marine ecosystems can no longer be ignored, nor blamed on anything other than gross mismanagement of the fisheries. Future generations will undoubtedly condemn us for our astonishing greed, rapacity and stupidity. In a few decades, the bountiful seas that once fed hundreds of millions of humans sustainably have been reduced to oceanic deserts. The ruthless fishing industries and spineless governments that have presided over destruction of the greatest animal biomasses on Earth—the whales and fishes—are guilty of criminal ecocide.

Iceland, concluded from page one fisheries. Whales are very big, and there are a lot of them, so they are quite obviously having an impact on fish stocks.

“We estimate we could probably be catching 10 to 20 percent more cod if we bring the whale stocks down to the optimum level. But those percentages are not based on sound scientific evidence, so our research programme is intended to get better data.”

Kristjan Loftsson, dubbed Iceland’s Captain Ahab for his obsession with going back to whaling, is more forthright. “I can’t see anything wrong with it (whaling). The whales eat up our fish.” Loftsson’s fleet stopped whale killing in 1989 due to an international boycott of Icelandic fish.

Finance Minister Geir Haarte claims that “Japan has traditionally been the buyer, and we hope they would be willing to buy again.”

But the proposal faces myriad

problems. Most importantly, Iceland’s booming tourist industry is feeding a huge market for whale-watching cruises. Pioneered by Asbjorn Bjorgvinsson and the Husavik Whale Center, his boats took out 62,050 tourists last year to see whales and other marine life, up from just 2,200 in 1995. He believes whaling would hurt the tourism industry and give Iceland an international black-eye.

Environmentalists denounce Iceland’s whaling scheme. Loftsson has gone so far as to propose killing Keiko, the orca that starred in the film *Free Willy*.

Special Event

Kids for Whales invite you to visit their “whale rescue zone” this afternoon on the bridge directly outside the Estrel Hotel, from noon to 15:00. At 13:15 they will meet with German Minister Renate Künast, and each IWC delegation will receive a special surprise gift.