



## Defending our oceans

"Greenpeace is committed to defending the health of the world's oceans and the plants, animals and people that depend upon them."

# The Industrialisation of Whaling



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Call me Ishmael .....! Whaling folklore speaks of tradition, of the noble hunt, of man pitting his wits against the ferocious sea and against mighty intelligent leviathans. But the history of whaling is far from glamorous, far from something to look back at through rose tinted spectacles. It is bloody tale of persecution, greed and stupidity, nowhere more so than in the waters encircling the Antarctic.

While whaling has been conducted for hundreds and even thousands of years, the sheer size and speed of many whales, like the blue whale, meant they were off limits to the whalers. It was not until the turn of the twentieth century that this pattern changed and the death toll began to increase from hundreds to tens of thousands, pushing many species towards the brink of extinction in less than half a century.

Rapid advancements in shipbuilding and the invention of the harpoon cannon in 1870 led to the construction of whaling factory ships. Ships with the speed, range and carrying capacity to take them all over the world in search of their prey: a search which led them into the Antarctic.

The first whaling station was established in the Antarctic in 1904, taking a few hundred whales a year. Ten years later the death toll spiralled into the thousands, contributing 40% of the global catch. In 1925 the factory ships began to arrive. These first forays were led by the British and the Norwegians.

Meanwhile, whaling off the coast of Japan was providing a cautionary tale, for over four hundred years a few coastal communities together had killed around 150 whales each year using nets. But the technological advances such as the explosive harpoon gun brought an end to net fishing and saw the coastal catch breach 1,000 by 1907. The coast of Japan was quickly being stripped of whales in what was to become a familiar pattern around the globe. First went the largest whales, in 1911 some 243 blue whales were caught off Japan's coast, but by 1934 only 21 could be found and killed.

By the mid 1930s the waters surrounding the Antarctic had become an international whale-killing field. Competing fleets from countries including Britain, the US, Argentina, Denmark, Japan, Norway, the Netherlands, Russia and Germany quickly sent whale populations plummeting. A decade later the whales were in serious trouble

and the international community could no longer ignore the combination of greed and stupidity.

In 1946 a new whaling battleground was born. The International Whaling Commission (IWC) was founded and its charter said: "Considering that the history of whaling has seen over-fishing of one area after another to such a degree that it is essential to protect all species from over-fishing."

But the power of the industry was too great for the IWC and the devastation continued. The IWC's first attempt at establishing a protected area for whales, simply called The Sanctuary, covering one quarter of what is now known as the Southern Ocean and which encircles Antarctica, lasted for only 9 years. Falling catches in the surrounding waters led to its suspension.

In 1965 the IWC finally banned the catching of blue whales in the Antarctic. The whalers responded in two ways, by moving to smaller species and by cheating. The Russian whaling fleet, for example, caught over 90,000 whales illegally in the Antarctic including totally protected species between '65 and the late 1970s.

As the plunder of Antarctic waters continued and catches plummeted, the IWC protected more species - fin whales were totally protected in 1975 and sei whales in 1979. Norway, the UK and the Netherlands stopped Antarctic whaling. Russia and Japan shifted their attention to the smallest of the great whales, the minke.

Greenpeace first joined the international efforts to protect whales in 1975, by placing an inflatable between the harpoons of the Russian whaling ship the Dalniy Vostok and a whale. Despite the danger, the gunner took aim and fired, narrowly missing the inflatable and hitting the whale. The images gathered flashed around the world, helping to galvanise the worldwide movement opposing whaling.

Over the last 30 years, Greenpeace has confronted whaling fleets from a host of countries including Australia, Norway, Russia, Spain, Iceland, Peru and Japan. During that time activists have repeatedly risked their lives to defend whales from the harpoon; they have been battered and bruised, arrested and jailed. Their bravery and perseverance has not gone unrewarded, they have played a vital role in bringing about

the global moratorium on commercial whaling and in creating the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary.

Buoyed by overwhelming public support, in 1985 Greenpeace delivered one million signatures to the IWC calling for an end to whaling, one year before an IWC global moratorium on whaling was enacted. Then in 1993 Greenpeace delivered two million signatures to the US Government calling for the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary. In 1994 the IWC designated the Southern Ocean as a Whale Sanctuary.

In response to the global moratorium Japan reduced its annual Southern Ocean catch to just over 300 minke whales, branding it as 'scientific', keeping it within the rules of the IWC if not the spirit. However, this whaling season the whalers have upped the

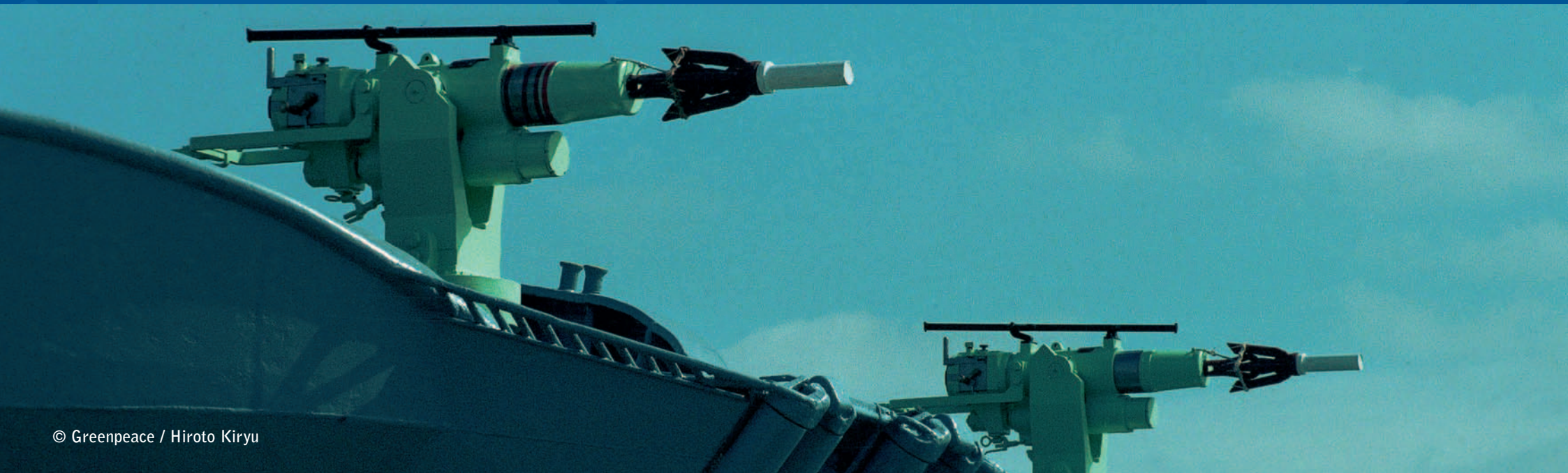
catch to a staggering 935 minke whales and a further expansion into larger species – fin whales and humpbacks - over the next two years.

Given the size and scale of the planned catch, Greenpeace will, for the seventh time, return to the Southern Ocean to defend the Sanctuary and protect the whales and to once again call for an end to the hunt.

While not every one is fortunate enough to be able to crew a Greenpeace ship, on this expedition anyone can join the Esperanza on-line and help us bring an end to whaling and to defend our oceans. To sign up as an Ocean Defender and sail with us on our incredible journey go to:

[oceans.greenpeace.org](http://oceans.greenpeace.org)





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Greenpeace is an independent, campaigning organisation, which uses non-violent, creative confrontation to expose global environmental problems, and to force solutions essential to a green and peaceful future

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