



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."

Tradition, culture and science

three more reasons to stop the hunt





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The very idea that whale hunting in the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary has anything to do with science and tradition rather than business and money, would be funny if it was not so tragic.

In recent years, Japan's pro-whaling lobbyists have deployed a series of excuses for continuing the hunt, despite the existence since 1986 of a global commercial whaling moratorium. First comes science: to gather much needed data, they claim, in order to restart commercial whaling on a sustainable basis. Second, comes culture: Japan's long tradition of whaling and the dietary importance of whale meat. Finally, a new and possibly the silliest, argument has been added: whales eat fish and are threatening fish stocks.

Taking the last first: no credible marine biologist believes that whales are responsible for the collapse of global fish stocks. Rather, they point to the huge international armada of factory ships scouring and devouring everything in their path: including over 300,000 whales, dolphins and porpoises each year, designated as by-catch, or accidental catch.

Blaming whales for collapsing fish stocks is like blaming woodpeckers for deforestation.

According to the Institute for Cetacean Research (ICR), a non-governmental organisation set up by the Fisheries Agency of Japan in 1987, Japan has a long tradition of whaling and a well established and vital whale meat culinary culture. ICR receives permits for 'scientific whaling' in the Southern Ocean from the Japanese Government. Once the "science" is completed the whales are parcelled and dispatched to commercial markets, local government and even schools.

In June it argued: "The whale to the Japanese in ancient times was a kind of fish that was thought to be brave and great. The total protection of all whales irrespective of

their stock status ... is contradictory to Japanese cultural values where whales are viewed as a food resource and where whales are still revered through religious ceremonies and festivals."

Whales are not fish! They are mammals; they do not produce hundreds of thousands of eggs each year. They produce no more than one calf every year or two, offspring which are nurtured, suckled and protected by their parents. This means their recovery from overexploitation is slow.

Few Japanese people view whales as a vital food source and even fewer actually eat them. According to a 2002 opinion poll commissioned by Japan's influential Asahi newspaper on the culture of whale meat consumption only 4% of the population regularly eat it, while 9% rarely eat it, 53% haven't eaten it since childhood and 33% never eat it. If there is any tradition at all it is limited to a handful of coastal communities and dates back only 400 or so years. Massive industrial scale whaling 10,000 km away from Japan in the waters around the Antarctic is not a tradition and did not begin until the 1930s.

While the struggle to save the whale is often characterised by dramatic high seas confrontations between environmentalists and the whalers, battle is also joined between diplomats within the International Whaling Commission (IWC). Established in 1946, it is responsible for the international moratorium on commercial whaling and for establishing the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary in 1994.

While Japan is an IWC member, the governing rules allow for countries to set their own quotas for 'scientific whaling' and to register an objection to new rules such as the moratorium and Sanctuary. Although Japan originally objected to the commercial whaling ban, it withdrew its objection following pressure from the US; its objection to the Southern Ocean Sanctuary still stands.

The IWC has repeatedly rejected Japan's 'scientific slaughter' and has asked for it to stop. At this year's IWC meeting, held in South Korea in June, Japan announced a new phase of "science", one which will see the number of minke whales taken from the Sanctuary annually more than double to 935, and will add 50 fin and 50 humpback whales over the next two years, both of which are listed as endangered species. The Commission also commented that the new plan would increase the hunt to "levels approaching the annual commercial quotas for Antarctic minke whales that were in place prior to the moratorium" and that "more than 6,800 minke whales have been killed in Antarctic waters" over the last 18 years in the name of science.

Cultures can change and new traditions begin. Over the past decade whale watching has shown the potential to become far more profitable than commercial whaling ever was. It is already generating a massive \$1 billion a year. Globally, 9 million people go whale watching each year in 87 countries. This number has increased on average by 12% annually since 1991.

As one observer put it, "you can watch a whale many times but you can only kill it once!"

This year two Greenpeace ships, the Esperanza and the Arctic Sunrise, will be going whale protecting and 'whaler' watching in the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary. While not every one is fortunate enough to be able to crew a Greenpeace ship, in what will be the first stage in an exciting year long expedition called "Defending our Oceans", anyone can join the Esperanza on-line - help us bring an end to whaling and to defend our oceans. To sign up as an Ocean Defender and sail with us go to:

oceans.greenpeace.org



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