

minke whale balaenoptera acutorostrata

PROPOSAL 4

Following the disastrous impacts of whaling during the 20th century, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) suspended commercial whaling in 1986. CITES has supported the work of the IWC by agreeing to list those whales protected by the IWC on Appendix I, eliminating the international trade in whale meats and fat. Japan is keen to resume trade in whale products, but in order to do so they need to downlist whales from CITES Appendix I.

This is the 5th successive proposal by Japan to downlist minke whales from Appendix I to Appendix II. All previous proposals failed by a substantial voting majority because they did not meet the necessary scientific criteria and would have brought CITES into conflict with the decisions made by the IWC. Like the whale downlisting proposal to COP12 in 2002, this proposal comes with a recommendation from the Secretariat to reject it. These facts alone are overwhelming reasons to reject the proposal.

GREENPEACE RECOMMENDS: reject proposal 4



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trading away the planet

MINKE WHALE

BALAENOPTERA ACUTOROSTRATA

PROPOSAL

description

Minke whales are long-lived, slow reproducing animals that produce single offspring. These characteristics as well as the continuing degradation of the oceans make them very vulnerable to overexploitation by commercial operations and mean that their populations can never recover quickly from over-exploitation.

threats

downlisting would de-list: Minke whale populations meet the criteria for Appendix I, however they would be internationally traded if their current listing was not upheld. A downlisting to Appendix II would effectively de-list the species altogether because Article XIV, paragraphs 4 and 5 exempts Iceland, Japan and Norway from CITES requirements for Appendix II marine species taken in accordance with IWC regulations. Two of these nations have filed objections to the IWC's zero quota decision and are therefore able to set any quota they wish, and yet still claim that their activities are in accordance with IWC regulations, regardless of scientific advice from the IWC.

split listing: Japan's proposal would create a split listing. This is particularly important as an endangered stock of minke whales, the "J stock", spends part of each year in the same waters as one of the stocks that Japan has proposed to downlist. Computer simulations conducted by the IWC have shown that any commercial take of the Okhotsk Sea - West Pacific stock will also result in the capture of some members of this endangered J stock. DNA testing would not be applicable in this situation as it is too lengthy to be a useful tool for whalers deciding whether the whale they are about to harpoon belongs to the J stock or not.

proposal flaws

distorted statistics: The proposal makes selective and distorted use of population statistics. For example, the proposal quotes out-dated editions of the Report of the International Whaling Commission's estimate of the global minke whale population of around 1 million. It glosses over the fact that over 3/4 of that estimate is for a separate species of minke whale, which is unrelated to the species and populations proposed for downlisting. The proposal also fails to mention that the estimate for the separate species has now been formally withdrawn by the IWC, following receipt of new survey data which suggest a sharp decrease in population. The IWC now acknowledges that it has no estimate for this population. The proposal also states that the 1983 level of the NE Atlantic stock has been estimated to be 70% of the 1952 level, but fails to mention whaling had been underway for more than two decades by 1952, with the average catch of around 2,500 a year.

fish catches: The proposal argues that the consumption of fish by whales is having a negative effect on fish catches. These claims are false, unscientific and irrelevant to a CITES listing. Before commercial whaling began, fish stocks were at very high levels despite a population of whales that was much larger than it is today. Whales and fish are part of the ocean ecosystem, and large populations of both used to exist in balance. Global fisheries are in trouble now due to over-exploitation by humans rather than by whales.

toxic fat: Japan's proposal claims that toxins and pollutants are only present at low levels in minke whale meat and blubber. However, in May 2003, a Norwegian scientific panel recommended to their government that whale blubber consumption be banned following research found that a single gram of blubber contained a tenth of the maximum weekly intake of PCBs (highly toxic chemical compounds) allowed under European Union guidelines. The Norwegian government subsequently accepted this recommendation.

no downlisting

Appendix I listing is fundamental in order to allow for the continued recovery of whale populations, many of which are below their natural level of abundance. It continues the close relationship between CITES and the IWC, under which CITES has given Appendix I status to all species of whales, and the listing maintains the precautionary approach toward whales adopted by CITES. Japan's proposal should be rejected.

**GREENPEACE**

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published by greenpeace international
date july 2004
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