

## **IWC 56 SORRENTO - CONSERVATION NOT EXPLOITATION**

### **WHALE WATCHING**

The view that whales are worth far more alive than dead is one that is shared by an increasing number of people worldwide, many of whom are directly benefiting from the phenomenal growth of whale watching.

Although the whale watching industry began in California in 1955 and grew steadily up to the mid 1980s, it was not until the late 1980s that it began to grow much more rapidly as it spread to Australia, New Zealand, the Canary Islands, Japan and other countries. This dramatic growth continued throughout the 1990s at a staggering 12.1% per year. Whale watching currently contributes more than US\$ 1 billion to the annual economies of coastal states around the world and is conducted in 87 countries attracting more than 9 million participants a year.

This year whale watching will once again be discussed both in the Scientific Committee of the IWC and during plenary. Representatives of international whale watching organizations have begun attending the IWC as observers.

#### ***Greenpeace and whale watching***

Greenpeace believes that whale watching, when managed on sound ecological principles, can be sustainable and can produce significant economic rewards to coastal communities. This is in stark contrast to commercial whaling which always leads to over-exploitation.

As well as the economic benefits and giving enjoyment to participants, whale watching can also be designed to promote educational, scientific and conservation goals. More information about this can be found in the Greenpeace briefing Principles and Policy Guidelines on Whale Watching, July 2001.

#### **South Pacific and whale watching**

"A live whale gives ongoing benefits and is more valuable than a dead one. Whaling and whale-watching are not compatible." Tamari'i Tatangata- Director of the South Pacific Environmental Programme in Islands Business, October 1999

The development of the whale watching industry in Vava'u (part of the Kingdom of Tonga in the South Pacific) provides a good example of how whale watching can bring substantial economic benefits directly to local communities in the developing world. In 1998 whale watching in Vava'u directly contributed US\$58,000 to the Eco-tourism economy and the indirect tourism expenditure from visitors who went whale watching within the same year was over 1 million US dollars per season.

Local tourism operators often stress the importance of whale watching. In a poll carried out in the island in 1999, 62% felt whales were 'extremely important' as a tourist attraction to Vava'u,

30% said whales had become 'important' and only 8% of the operators said they felt whales were 'not important'.

This reliance on whales in the area has created a strong opposition to the resumption of commercial whaling in the region. Tourism operators and whale watch operators alike are unanimous in their agreement that a return to whaling practices of any type in Tonga would be detrimental to their business.

Tourists visiting the island by air, echoed this attitude towards commercial whaling - 74% 'strongly disagreeing' with commercial whaling and 21% of them 'disagreeing'. Of the same sample 26% said they would be less likely to holiday at a location where whales were hunted, while 52% 'strongly agreed' with the same statement. Similar polls conducted in other whale watching destinations have also suggested that whaling and a healthy whale watching industry are incompatible.

#### Iceland and whale watching

The governments of such countries as Brazil, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, all of which were once whaling nations, have embraced the non-consumptive use of whales in the form of whale watching as a truly sustainable alternative to whaling. But the Icelandic government has stated its intent to resume whaling even at the risk of jeopardizing its flourishing whale watching industry.

Iceland began a two year 'scientific' whaling programme in 2003 which was intended to take 100 minke whales, 100 fin whales and 50 sei whales a year. Although this program was presented as 'scientific', the Fisheries Minister, Arni Matthiesen, made it clear that the programme would only go forward if Japan agreed to import whale meat produced by the hunt, confirming that this is primarily a commercial venture. Japan did not agree to the imports and the hunt was scaled back to about 40 minkes a year. The Icelandic Tourist Industry Association (ITIA), whose members include the country's main airline, Iceland Air, warned at its AGM in April, 2003 that there would be "dire consequences" if Iceland were to resume whaling without international agreement. There have been strong and continuing protests from Iceland's whale watching industry.

Whale watching is far more lucrative than whaling could ever be for Iceland, with the income from whale watching and the benefits it generated in 2002 totaling more than \$16 million, over four times the annual income generated by the 'scientific' whaling programme conducted by Iceland between 1985 and 1989. Income in 2003 was \$25 million, and it was expected to continue to increase, but the Icelandic press reported a huge drop in bookings for the start of 2004, following the decision to resume whaling.

#### Whale watching and IWC

In 1993, the importance of the whale watching industry was recognized by the IWC which invited contracting Governments to undertake a preliminary assessment of the extent, and economic and scientific value, of whale watching activities. This led to the establishment of the Scientific Committee's whale watching subcommittee, which among other things has agreed some general guidelines for whale watching and collated existing whale watching regulations from around the world. In 1996, the IWC adopted a Resolution that underlined the IWC's future role in monitoring and advising on the subject.

Despite the obvious value of this work and its direct relevance to the vast majority of IWC members (over 3/4 of IWC member countries, including whaling countries Norway and Japan,

have whale watching operations) the work of whale watching subcommittee has been insufficiently resourced. In fact, the Fisheries Agency of Japan and its allies have vigorously opposed the work and have claimed that the work of the subcommittee is beyond the scope of the IWC.

### ***Greenpeace demands***

Greenpeace believes that the IWC should direct the work of its Scientific Committee away from issues of interest to the whalers and towards conservation and that in doing so should extend the work of the subcommittee on whale watching. IWC member governments should oppose any attempts to downgrade or eliminate this work.

Money should be made available for whale watching experts from developing countries to attend the Scientific Committee, as many have never been able to do so due to lack of funding.

Data obtained from whale watching vessels and details of whale watching activities are matters of importance to the on-going work of the IWC and can directly benefit whale conservation. Greenpeace believes that this information should be included in National Progress Reports and can help further our understanding of the oceans and the cetaceans that inhabit them.

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