



Whalefacts: The International Whaling Commission

- This year, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) will meet in Anchorage, Alaska. It will be the 59th meeting in the organization's history.
- The IWC first met in 1949, and has met every year since. The Commission's Scientific Committee meets for two weeks, followed by a week of working groups, and then the main meeting. This year, the main meeting will take place from May 28-31.
- The original 15 members of the IWC were Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Panama, South Africa, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Japan joined in 1951.
- Beginning in 1979, IWC membership started to grow: 23 members in 1979, 41 by 1985. Today, there are more than 70 countries that are members of the IWC.

Early Failures

- The initial members were whaling nations. The goal of the IWC was to "provide for the proper development of whale stocks and thus make possible the orderly development of the whaling industry."
- However, in its early days, the Commission achieved neither, as one after another, remaining whale populations were hunted to near-extinction as member nations pursued their own narrow self-interests.
- As whale populations diminished, whaling became uneconomical, and one after another, the whaling nations hung up their harpoons.
- By the late 1960s and early 1970s, as environmental awareness increased, these former whaling countries began to push for whale conservation.

From Regulation of Whaling to Conservation of Whales

- In 1972, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm, Sweden, passed a resolution by 52 votes to 0, calling for a ten-year moratorium on commercial whaling.
- Similar resolutions were introduced in the IWC in 1972, 1973, and 1974. But the proposal didn't receive the required three-quarters majority.
- Beginning in 1979, however, more and more countries joined the IWC which had never been involved in whaling but which were concerned for the future of the great whales. This influx of membership allowed the IWC to adopt a series of conservation measures.
- In 1979, the IWC banned the hunting of all whale species (except minke whales) by factory ships, and declared the entire Indian Ocean as a whale sanctuary.
- In 1982, the IWC adopted an indefinite global moratorium on commercial whaling. This moratorium was scheduled to take effect in the 1985/86 Antarctic whaling season.
- In 1994, the Commission declared the entire Southern Ocean to be a sanctuary for whales.

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Loopholes, Evasions, and Threats

- Despite the moratorium, loopholes in the IWC convention allow commercial whaling to continue.
- Under IWC regulations, any member country may lodge an objection to an IWC decision within 90 days, and thus be exempt from that decision.
- **Norway** lodged an official objection to the moratorium in 1982, and is not bound by it. It continues to hunt minke whales in the North Atlantic.
- **Iceland** left the IWC in 1992 but rejoined in 2003 with a reservation to the moratorium. It began commercial whaling in 2006.
- **Japan** conducts commercial whaling in the Antarctic and North Pacific under a loophole in the IWC convention that allows countries to kill whales for “scientific research.” It began this “scientific whaling” in the Antarctic in 1987, and in the North Pacific in 1996. The IWC has repeatedly requested that Japan not conduct this “research,” but under IWC rules, Japan is free to ignore the IWC and set its own quotas. The meat from this “research whaling” is packaged and sold on the market.

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