

Opinion

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SEA SLAUGHTER

STOP YOUR WHALING

An open letter to the Norwegian Ambassador

by RUTHERFORD

Toronto communications consultant with a passion for whales, these are his remarks to His Excellency Jan E. Nyheim, Norwegian Ambassador to Canada

AS YOUR EXCELLENCY may know, fully 70 per cent of our planet's oxygen is produced, not by the tropical rainforests, but by ocean plankton. But, perhaps Your Excellency is not aware that the policies of your government (and others — notably Japan and Iceland) threaten to destroy this vital ecosystem — the real "lungs of the world" on which all life directly depends.

Over the past 25 years, the zooplankton population has increased by truly exponential proportions, further accelerating the already well-documented rise in ocean temperatures worldwide. If this trend continues, the ability of the oceans to support its plankton will certainly collapse: the plankton will die — and with them will go our atmosphere.

It is not a coincidence that during the same time, five different species of whales — the natural predator of zooplankton — have been pushed virtually to the brink of extinction. It is no exaggeration to suggest that the continued slaughter of the whale, the intelligence and sensitivity of whom we are just beginning to fully comprehend, tampers foolishly with the future of all life on this planet.

But still, your country persists in hunting whales, now under the pretense of "scientific research." This, despite serious objections and calls to desist by the scientific advisors to the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and the existence of non-lethal methods of accurately gathering the same information.

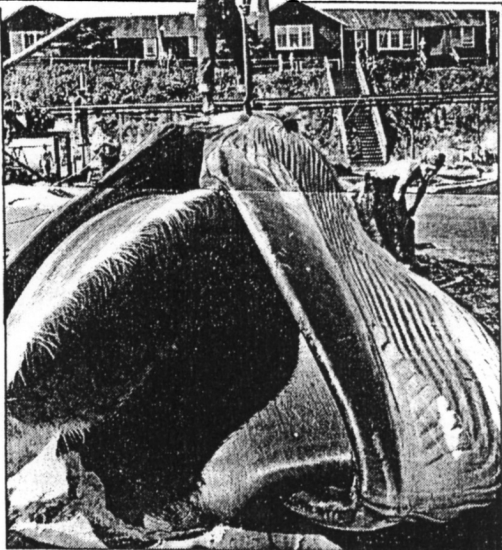
While it is true that the number of whales to be taken not seriously, in itself, threaten the minke whale population; the intense pain and suffering caused by the repeated use of explosive harpoons as well as the subsequent drowning is unimaginably horrific.

As for the claim to be studying "effective resource management," (as if any modern nation could seriously offer such a claim in the face of our dismal record of managing non-human life), recent reports by the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas has demonstrated that the most significant predators of fish stocks are actually — other fishes. But, as biologist David Lavigne has pointed out, those who call for "culling for science and management" repeatedly discover that the greatest threat to commercial fish stocks are those same species who themselves are commercially valuable. Such convenient and self-serving conclusions only insult the notion of scientific objectivity.

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Despite a decision to ban such trade under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered



Species, it has been reported that Norway continues to sell whalemeat from research catches. In an attempt to explain his country's reaction to the 1986 IWC ban on commercial whaling, Mr. Kazuo Shima, (an official with Japan's Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries) was quoted by the British press as saying, "It's no one else's business what we eat."

This year, your research will make available a further 110 whales (and 400 by 1995) to the many restaurants in Japan specializing in whalemeat. Some research program — I can imagine a scientific classification for those specimens: Prime Grade A.

It must be understood that it is not my intention to accuse Norway unfairly. I hope for (and I would actively encourage) a like response by the international community to the Mulroney government's disgraceful treatment of Beluga whales in Canadian waters, for I believe that concerned citizens worldwide share a responsibility to condemn all such dangerous and short-sighted actions by governments. Commercial whaling is particularly short-sighted because, as whale populations are known to recover from exploitation very slowly, it is simply not economical to "harvest" whale stocks sustainably. Rather, it is always in the whalers' financial interests to make a quick killing — even at the risk of driving the whale to extinction.

While I readily acknowledge the

important contributions made by whaling nations to our knowledge and understanding of cetaceans, surely the time has come when the value of whatever data is still deemed necessary — and which is available only by causing the death of a whale — must be re-evaluated in light of the potentially catastrophic environmental consequences.

THE TIME is long overdue for humanity to progress beyond our narrow, selfish and unsustainable method of accounting in which we define all other forms of life according to their value to us as natural resources. We could begin by renaming the various government agencies charged with the welfare of non-human life to reflect a recognition of all species' fundamental right to exist.

I am certain Your Excellency will concede that, like all nations, Norway's best interests are indistinguishable from those of the Earth itself. With all the respect due your office, I entreat Your Excellency, and through you, your government, to ensure that the international respect Norway otherwise enjoys is employed in the higher service of our planet.

It is certain that, unless we soon accept the enormous responsibility inherent in the power we have fought so hard to achieve over our environment, our fate — and the fate of this planet — is as bleak as it is absolute. □



PAST AND PRESENT: Japan, Norway and Iceland continue to slaughter whales for what is called scientific research (left), but some people see little difference between this and old-style harvesting (above).