

Save Whales → Not Whaling

Solutions: Benefiting Whales and People

The Humane Society of the United States believes that commercial whaling has no place in modern society. We no longer need the bone, blubber, meat, and oil that whales used to supply. Rather, today, whales are more valuable alive than dead. Protecting whales not only helps the animals but also provides financial, educational, and aesthetic opportunities for people.

AN END TO WHALING

The ultimate solution to the current controversy over whaling is to ban the practice entirely. A complete and permanent ban would quell the constant battles over interpretation of International Whaling Commission (IWC) rules and exceptions and eliminate the looming threat of a resumption in commercial whaling with its imprecise quota system and lack of enforcement. Substitutes for whale products are widely available, so there is no place for commercial whaling in today's economy. Living whales are far more valuable.

SANCTUARIES

Until commercial whaling ceases entirely, one of the best ways to protect whales is to create sanctuaries for them—areas that provide safe refuge for whales during critical feeding, breeding, and calving times. Whaling nations would not be able to hunt whales commercially in a sanctuary regardless of how many loopholes they may find in the international whaling regulations.

Ideally, all nations would create regional sanctuaries, and the IWC would recognize them. So far the IWC itself has created two sanctuaries: one in the Southern Ocean (Antarctica) and one in the Indian Ocean. An attempt by Australia and New Zealand to create a South Pacific sanctuary was defeated at the 2000 IWC meeting.

The creation of whale sanctuaries will need to follow certain guidelines. First, the purpose of the sanctuary should be stated broadly enough to allow it to evolve without legal limitations. Second, the sanctuaries should have clearly defined boundaries. Third, sanctuaries should allow surrounding communities to have a stake in them. If community members become stakeholders in a sanctuary, they will be more likely to promote its success and protect it from exploitation. Sanctuaries would not only keep whales safe from hunting but also engage and benefit the community, particularly since sanctuaries can promote whale watching.

WHALE WATCHING

Whereas once there was economic gain in whaling, today a live whale is more profitable than a dead one. Whale watching can be an educational and nonharmful way for people to profit from whales. Today the whale-watching industry is worth \$1 billion according to a recent study, and the profits go to a broader range of the community. Almost 500 communities in 87 countries offer whale- and dolphin-watching tours. But it isn't just the tour operators who benefit from whale watching: Local communities profit from tourist dollars spent on restaurants, lodging, and other services. A return to commercial whaling would not bring in tourists or benefit communities and businesses.

Even in Norway and Japan—the two nations that continue to hunt whales for commercial or “scientific” purposes—whale watching is growing and thriving. Citizens of both countries are beginning to recognize that, while selling whale meat might be profitable, observing whales swimming freely in the ocean has greater value.

Even in Iceland, which hunted whales as recently as a decade ago, whale watching is on the rise. In 1999 ten companies took more than 35,000 people whale watching, earning an estimated \$8 million. Even though the Althing (Iceland's parliament) is currently debating whether or not to rejoin the IWC and recommence whaling, there is a strong opposition movement primarily made up of citizens who recognize that it would be impossible for their small country to succeed at both whaling and whale watching. ➡

Promoting the protection of all animals

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SANCTIONS

While some countries continue to whale in defiance of the IWC moratorium, trade sanctions can be a persuasive means of getting them to stop—at least temporarily. In late November 2000, The Humane Society of the United States submitted a petition to then-Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt urging him to formally certify Japan under the Pelly Amendment for undermining the effectiveness of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. The Pelly Amendment allows any person or entity to petition the U.S. government to certify that nationals of a foreign country are diminishing the effectiveness of an international endangered or threatened species program. If this determination is made, then the president has discretionary power to impose trade sanctions against that country.

While then-President Bill Clinton decided not to impose trade sanctions against Japan, he did express serious concerns over Japan's expanded whaling and its practice of taking whales in the Southern Ocean whale sanctuary north of Antarctica. Clinton stated he would urge Japan to reconsider its policy, which he believed undermines the effectiveness of the IWC. Clinton noted that Japan's whaling is clearly out of step with the growing international consensus in support of whale sanctuaries and is in sharp contrast to other coastal countries that have taken steps to protect whales.

Clinton left open the door to impose sanctions at a later date by directing the Departments of State, Commerce, Interior, and Treasury, as well as the office of the U.S. Trade Representative, to keep this matter under active review.

President George W. Bush now has the opportunity to show the American people that he takes seriously the plight of the world's whales. As have other presidents before him, Bush can hold another country accountable for its actions. By imposing trade sanctions against Japan, Bush can send a strong message to Japan that the United States and the majority of the world's nations want an end to commercial whaling. The Humane Society of the United States is calling upon its members and supporters to contact both the Bush administration and Congress to take measures to force Japan to stop needlessly killing whales and live up to its international obligations.