

Whaling cruelty: eye-witness accounts and public opinion

It is not only Norway's data that shows that whaling is cruel. This account from a Norwegian whaling advocate provides a candid acknowledgement that whales suffer as a result of the imprecision inherent to the slaughter methods:

'...it is documented that at least 80% of the minke whales harvested in Norway are dead instantaneously... most of the remaining animals lose consciousness and thus do not experience any pain... However, we are fully aware that some animals are neither dead instantaneously nor unconscious until death, nor do they actually lose consciousness. In these cases, pain is inflicted upon the animals.'¹²

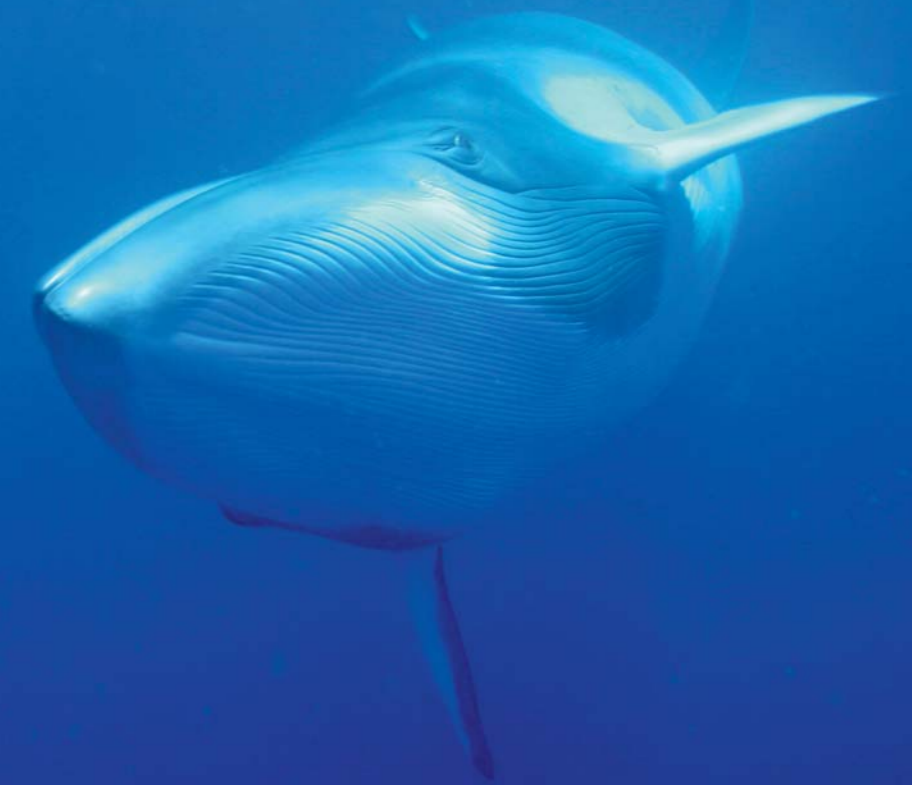
– Norwegian whaling advocate.

Furthermore, independent and covert footage of a Norwegian whale hunt recorded at random during 2005 showed a whale that was struck with a harpoon and then shot with a rifle seven times before finally dying 14 minutes and 30 seconds later¹³.

Norwegian public opinion on welfare standards for commercial meat production

A March 2007 Norwegian public opinion poll¹⁴ revealed that:

- **73%** of Norwegians polled **agreed** that all mammals killed for commercial purposes in Norway should be afforded the same level of legislative protection to prevent pain and prolonged suffering; and
- **79%** of people polled **did not agree** that it was acceptable for it to take more than 15 minutes from when a whale is shot to when it dies.



Conclusions and recommendations

There are glaring inconsistencies between Norway's legislative welfare provisions for the slaughter of farm animals and the inferior welfare standards inherent to the killing of whales, although commercial food production is the purpose of both. Since the global ban on commercial whaling came into force in 1986, Norway has killed 7,157 minke whales using penthrite grenade harpoons, a slaughter method with such a high margin of error that it simply would not be tolerated by the Norwegian government or public for slaughter of terrestrial animals for commercial food production. Whaling is tarnishing Norway's international reputation on animal welfare.

WSPA and WDCS urge the Norwegian government to:

- ensure consistency of welfare standards for all animals slaughtered commercially for meat, by **immediately ceasing commercial whaling operations**;
- provide full welfare data sets to the IWC on all whaling operations, in order that this information can be analysed and the **true welfare implications of whaling can be made available to the public**.

Animal welfare in Norway: *an inconsistent truth*

Both whales and farm animals are slaughtered and processed for commercial sale in Norway. Whale meat is sold on the same supermarket shelves as pork, beef and chicken. But whilst farmed animals are afforded legislative protection from pain and prolonged suffering at slaughter, hunted whales are not. As there is no way to ensure a humane death for hunted whales, the options for Norway are limited: inhumane slaughter or an end to commercial whaling.

This briefing outlines an inconsistency in the provision for animal welfare protection in Norwegian legislation. **It concludes that the only way to ensure that the principles of animal welfare are applied consistently for hunted whales in Norway is for whaling to cease.**



References:

¹ Council of Europe ETS no. 102.
² nr 775: Forskrift om dyrevern i slakterier
³ IWC/WKM&AWI 25
⁴ 2 *ibid*
⁵ http://www.oie.int/eng/normes/mcode/en_chapitre_3.7.5.htm
⁶ Animal Welfare Act No. 73 of 20 December 1974 Ref. Previous

Acts No. 7 of 21 June 1929 and NO. 13 of 7 June 1035.

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ http://www.oie.int/eng/normes/mcode/en_chapitre_3.7.5.htm and Shimshony, A. and Chaudry, M. M. 2005.

Slaughter of animals for human consumption. Rev. sci. tech. Off. Int. Epiz. 24 (2): 693-710.

⁹ Act No. 38 of 29th May 1981, Relating to Wildlife and Wildlife Habitats.

¹⁰ Council Directive 93/119/EC of 22nd December 1993 on the Protection of Animals at the Time of Slaughter or Killing.

¹¹ IWC, Chair's Report of the 58th Annual Meeting, 2006.

¹² High North Alliance 2004. <http://www.highnorth.no/Oxford%20mai%202004%20wspa.pdf>

¹³ IWC/WKM&AWI 12.

¹⁴ Opinion AS LANDSOMFATTENDE OMNIBUSS. 1,000 participants. Poll dates 13-19th March, 2007

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Commercial meat production and welfare inconsistencies in Norway

Norway prides itself on its reputation for seeking to improve the welfare of domestic and livestock animals; it was one of the first European countries to require the stunning before slaughter of all livestock, including those killed during ritual slaughter¹.

However, there is an inconsistency in Norwegian animal welfare policy: Norway is failing to grant the same protection to whales that it affords other animals slaughtered for meat. Norway is failing to protect the welfare of whales.



Stunning and unconsciousness

The Norwegian Regulation for Animal Protection in Slaughterhouses² requires that an animal shall be killed swiftly after it has become unconscious from stunning, to ensure that it dies from the bleeding procedure without regaining consciousness. Norwegian law does not afford whales the protection of stunning before harpoon impact and explosion, which does not cause immediate death or loss of consciousness at least 20% of the time³. A Norwegian delegate at the 2006 meeting of the IWC noted himself that in hunting the risk of only wounding an animal is higher than in slaughterhouses¹¹.

Norwegian legislation⁴ also stipulates that animals in abattoirs shall be secured to ensure that the process of stunning does not expose the animal to unnecessary pain, suffering, stress or injury. By contrast, whales are targeted from a moving platform on a moving sea; they are neither stunned nor secured before being shot with the first harpoon. The forerunner rope is not an adequate or reliable means of securing these large animals without inflicting pain and distress.

Norway is a member of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), whose Guidelines for the Slaughter of Animals recommend that 'Conscious animals should not be thrown or dragged'⁵. Norway does not make any such provision for whales which, whilst still conscious, may be winched by the embedded harpoon towards the vessel for application of secondary killing methods.

Appropriate weaponry

Norwegian legislation⁶ states that the weaponry used to kill animals requiring immediate euthanasia due to illness or injury should be sufficiently effective so that the animal is not exposed to the risk of unnecessary suffering. By comparison, whales which are injured but not immediately killed by the harpoon may endure several rifle shots before finally losing consciousness, calling into question the efficacy of the rifle as a sufficiently effective secondary (emergency) killing method.

Since 1993 Norway has killed 6,733 minke whales in commercial hunts

79% of people polled **did not agree** that it was acceptable for it to take **more than 15 minutes** from when a whale is shot to when it dies.

Slaughter in full view

In an effort to reduce the psychological stress of slaughter, the Norwegian Animal Welfare Act⁷ requires that, as far as possible, killing should be performed out of sight of other animals. However, the opportunistic nature of whale hunts means that whales may be killed in the presence of other whales, which may include related individuals and members of their social group.

Calves killed in the womb

The OIE's Guidelines for the Slaughter of Animals for Human Consumption include strict provisions relating to the management of fetuses during the slaughter of pregnant females, including that the foetus must be unconscious before being removed from the uterus⁸. However, despite Norway's OIE membership there are no provisions in Norway for determining if a female whale is pregnant before being targeted during a whaling operation and no specific provisions governing the slaughter of fetuses during these hunts.

Animal welfare legislation and the whaling loophole

Norway's lack of regulation in respect to the welfare of hunted whales is in contradiction to its regulations on livestock slaughter as well as its Animal Welfare Act and its Wildlife Act⁹, which all require that animals are not exposed to unnecessary suffering. In addition to its commitment to the OIE Guidelines for the Slaughter of Animals, Norway, as a member of the Council of Europe, has ratified the Council's conventions on animal welfare. Due to its trade relationship with the EU Norway has a number of commitments to animal welfare, including under the EU Slaughter Directive¹⁰. Despite all of these domestic and international measures to protect animal welfare, Norway still fails to provide adequate protection for whale welfare.

Whaling: the welfare paradox

Research into the welfare of hunted whales in Norway has been unparalleled in other whaling nations. Despite these efforts Norwegian whaling fails to meet the welfare standards Norway demands for the slaughter of other animals whose meat is sold commercially. Why is this? There are many variables associated with whaling which reduce the likelihood of an accurate shot and a humane death. Hunters attempt to strike a moving target on a moving sea, sometimes in adverse weather conditions. The margin for error during whale hunts is large and would be unacceptable in a Norwegian slaughterhouse.



One in five hunted whales – 210 in the full 2007 quota – may not be killed immediately following the initial harpoon strike.