

NORWEGIAN MINKE WHALING 2009

Ministry of Fisheries and Coastal Affairs, Norway

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In Norway only one whale species is targeted, namely the minke whale, that is traditionally hunted with small fishing vessels that are rigged for whaling in the season. After it is dead, the whale is hauled on board across the deck and butchered. Meat, blubber and other products are brought to processing plants in land either in fresh state or after being stored in ice in the hold.

Harpoon guns of calibres 50 mm and 60 mm equipped with the Norwegian penthrite harpoon grenade developed in 1997-1999 (IWC/55/WK17, IWC/58/WKM&AWI 25) are used for the hunt. Rifles with full metal jacket, round nosed bullets with a minimum calibre of 9.3mm, are used as back-up weapons (IWC/55/WK15, IWC/55/WK17). The gunners are required to pass obligatory shooting tests, both with rifles and harpoon guns. Prior to the hunt the boats are controlled and approved for hunting by inspectors from the Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries and the Norwegian Food Safety Authority. At-sea monitoring is carried out by the Electronic Trip Recorder (Blue Box) developed in 2001-2005 (IWC/57/RMS/8). In addition inspectors from the Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries are conducting periodic and random checks of the hunting activities. Some years observers under the NAMMCO International Observation Scheme are present on board during the hunting season.

In 2009, 484 whales were taken by 21 vessels. No whales were reported lost or to have escaped wounded. Inspectors from the Directorate of Fisheries carried out land based inspections. One vessel was reported to the police due to suspicion of infringement of the national and international ban on using cold grenade harpoon. The case has not yet been concluded by the court. The Directorate of Fisheries has excluded the vessel from the hunt in 2010 and the value of the assumed illegal catch was confiscated. This administrative action has been appealed to the Ministry of Fisheries and Coastal Affairs.

Research and developments on whale killing methods in Norway

Research on improved hunting and killing methods for whales has been conducted in Norway since 1981, with the most active research periods being 1981-86, 1992-95 and 1997-2003 (IWC/58/WKM&AWI 25). Detailed data on the performance of the different killing methods used during these time periods have been collected for scientific purposes for 5552 whales and reported to the IWC. From 1992 to 2007, twenty-seven extensive reports and publications have been presented to, and discussed in, five workshops organized by the IWC, in addition to annual reports. In 1981-83 when cold harpoons were used the percentage of animals recorded dead within 1 minute was 17%. The average time to death (TTD) was more than 11 minutes with a high rate of re-shooting (IWC/TC36/HK1). The results from 2000-2002 with the new penthrite grenade showed that at least 80% of the whales were rendered unconscious or dead instantly. The average TTD was about 2 minutes using the criteria adopted by the IWC (IWC/33/15), which will include periods when animals have been unconscious or already dead (IWC/47/18, IWC/51/12, IWC/58/WKM&AWI 21). Very few animals (< 0.5%) needed a second harpoon shot.

Information on improvements of whaling operations

The Norwegian research on hunting and killing methods for whales has resulted in the adoption of improved whaling methods and regulations for several species of whales. Following the recommendations of the "IWC Action Plan", Dr. EO Øen of Norway continued his co-operative work with hunters, scientists, authorities, and whale hunters' organisations in Norway, USA (Alaska), The Russian Federation (Chukotka), Canada (Nunavut and Nunavik), Greenland and Iceland also in 2009 and assisted in the teaching and training of hunters and transferred knowledge, developments and technology derived from the above mentioned research in order to improve the hunting methods and hunting gears used for marine mammals. Dr. Øen has also chaired workshops and lectured in local (Alaska) and international workshops (NAMMCO) and training sessions for hunters of marine mammals.