

**Chairman's Report to the Commission on the Workshop on Whale Killing Methods and
Associated Welfare Issues**

St. Kitts & Nevis, Sunday 11 to Tuesday 13 June 2006

Dr. Torsten Morner (Chair)

The workshop was conducted in St. Kitts from the 11th to 13th June 2006. Twenty five working papers from nine Contracting Governments were presented and discussed in the context of the Workshop Agenda Items following the Terms of Reference adopted by the Commission at IWC/57 in Ulsan, Republic of Korea, and make recommendations concerning:

1. Practical criteria for determining the onset of irreversible insensibility and death;
2. Means of improving the efficiency of whale killing methods;
3. Reducing time to death and other associated welfare issues;
4. Means of reducing struck and loss rates in whaling operations;
5. The welfare implications of methods used to kill whales caught in nets where they are not released alive; and
6. Practicable methods of reviewing and collecting data from aboriginal hunts.

Submitted papers were discussed under the following agenda items: Description of whale hunting/euthanasia practices, improvements seen and remaining problem areas; Criteria for determining the onset of irreversible insensibility and death; Summary of recent advances and outstanding issues, and development recommendations. The workshop did not have time to do a review of the revised action plan from the 2003 meeting in Berlin.

It was also noted that on 10 June 2006, aboriginal subsistence whalers from the countries of Denmark on behalf of Greenland (Organization of Fisherman and Hunters in Greenland), the Russian Federation (Association of Traditional Marine Mammal Hunters), and the USA (Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission and Makah Whaling Commission) met for an historic, first-time meeting to share information on whale killing methods and animal welfare issues. The primary points of agreement from this meeting are provided in our Workshop Report.

Several reports were given demonstrating improvements that have been made in the development and application of killing methods in aboriginal subsistence whaling, and improved data on animal welfare and time to death.

Denmark reported that an Action Plan on Whale Hunting Methods started in 1989 and was implemented in 1991. The plan included the introduction of the Norwegian penthrite grenade, as well as renovation of harpoon cannons and training on handling and use of whaling equipment.

The USA noted that the Makah whale hunt was voluntarily ended in the 1920s due to depletion of the population by unregulated commercial whaling. In May 1999, The Tribe harvested their first whale in 70 years. The harvest method implemented sought to incorporate traditional aspects of the hunt, while at the same time employing a safe and humane harvest method. Regarding the Alaska Eskimo bowhead whale subsistence hunt, it was reported that subsistence hunters make every effort to dispatch the whale as quickly as possible to provide a humane death for the whale, to reduce the chance of losing the whale, and to reduce the amount of time hunters in small boats must spend in the frigid waters of the Arctic Ocean. It was

further reported that the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission has undertaken an extensive program to upgrade the safety and humaneness of its traditional weapons used in the hunt.

The Russian Federation reported that the aboriginal hunters use a single hunting method, but one where subtle differences in the hunt are based on the size of the whale and the species (i.e., bowhead versus gray whale). In the gray whale hunt, animals are harpooned before being shot with a high caliber rifle. For the bowhead whale hunt, animals are harpooned and then shot with a darting gun. The native hunters expressed concern that individuals not familiar with the hunt and hunting conditions would not appreciate the harsh conditions under which they are required to hunt. Therefore, as was the case with the bowhead hunt in Alaska, safety of the hunters is of primary importance.

An extensive report was provided by Norway regarding progress in whale killing methods and animal welfare made in Norwegian whaling. The improvements were attributed to improvements in the penthrate grenade and a better harpoon delivery system, as well as advancements in the secondary killing methods. It was noted that many of these advancements were exported to several other countries and also in aboriginal subsistence whaling.

A number of papers were presented reviewing the Norwegian whale hunting method. Summaries of these papers are presented in the report. There was no consensus within the Workshop regarding the conclusions of these papers, although several key recommendations regarding future research were agreed (see below).

Several papers were also presented reviewing whaling under special permit. The primary findings and comments regarding these papers are also found in the report of the workshop. As was the case for commercial whaling, there were no points of agreement reached by workshop participants other than the general recommendations discussed below.

Workshop members agreed eleven specific recommendations for making improvements in whale killing methods. These recommendations are also presented in the workshop report. Many of the recommendations address issues related to (1) adequate or improved training of hunters or whalers in the best available practices, (2) exchange of information regarding best practices among member nations, and (3) the importance of maintaining equipment.

There has been encouraging improvements in the provision of relevant data on whale killing methods from Contracting Governments, and it is hoped that this trend will continue. However, it is important to point out that the submission of data necessary to achieve the goals of this workshop and similar workshops should be appreciated and the submission of data to future workshops encouraged. During this workshop, several of the comments directed at the reports containing this information were unnecessarily critical and in some cases irrelevant. It should be recognized that such actions are likely to discourage the submission of the information to future meetings, which are needed to achieve the management objectives of the IWC regarding Whale Killing Methods and Associated Welfare Issues.

Respectfully submitted,

Torsten Morner