

NORWEGIAN MINKE WHALING 2011

Ministry of Fisheries and Coastal Affairs, Norway

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In Norway only minke whales are hunted using 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. The meat and other products are brought to processing plants on land either in fresh state or after being stored in ice in the hold.

In 2011, 533 whales were taken by 20 vessels. Five whales (0.9%) were reported lost and sank after they were dead. No whales were reported to escape wounded. At-sea monitoring was carried out by the Electronic Trip Recorder System (Blue Box). In addition periodic checks of the hunting activities were carried out on eight boats by inspectors from the Directorate of Fisheries.

Weapons and monitoring of the hunt

Harpoon guns of calibres 50 mm and 60 mm equipped with the Norwegian penthrite harpoon grenade developed in 1997-1999, Whale grenade -99, (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 9.3 mm, are used as back-up weapons (IWC/55/WK15, IWC/55/WK17). The gunners are required to pass obligatory shooting tests, both with rifle and harpoon gun. 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 on all boats 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 hunt. Some years observers under the NAMMCO International Observation Scheme are present on board during the hunting season.

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 during 1981-86, 1992-95 and 1997-2003 (IWC/55/WK/17, 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 minke whales. The results were continuously reported to the IWC. From 1992 to 2007 twenty-seven extensive reports and scientific publications were presented to, and discussed in, five workshops organized by the IWC.

The results from 2000-2002 using the new whale grenade (IWC/58/WKM&AWI 25) showed that at least 80% of the whales were rendered instantly irreversibly unconscious or dead. The recorded 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/55/WK14, IWC/55/WK16, IWC/58/WKM&AWI 20, IWC/58/WKM&AWI 21). Very few animals (< 0.5%) needed a second harpoon shot.

In comparison when cold harpoons were used (1981-83) the percentage of animals recorded dead quickly (instant or within 1 minute) was 17%. The average time to death (TTD) was more than 11 minutes with 17 per cent of re-shooting (IWC/TC36/HK1).

Other 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 has worked co-operatively with hunters, scientists, authorities, and whale hunters' organisations in Norway, Canada (Nunavut and Nunavik), Greenland, Iceland, Japan, The Russian Federation (Chukotka) and the USA (Alaska), 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 methods and techniques used for the hunting of whales. Norwegian scientists have also participated in and chaired expert group meetings in NAMMCO on whale killing data assessment (NAMMCO, 2010, 2011) and lectured in local workshops and training sessions for hunters.