

Hunting and Protecting of Marine Mammals – A Clash of Cultures?



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Text: Helena von Troil

Foreword

The mission of the Nordic Committee on Bioethics is “to foster cooperation between the Nordic countries by bringing together representatives from different backgrounds to discuss and analyze issues in bioethics in order to achieve greater awareness, promote common understanding, improve policy making and present internationally a Nordic perspective on bioethical challenges”. To honour this mission the committee has, over the years, organized a number of conferences on topics related to medical, genetic and environmental ethics with the aim of encouraging dialogue between different disciplines and stakeholders. A wide range of topics has been covered, such as mental health, stem cell research, reproductive technology, bio banks, teaching bioethics, and bioethics of the sea, to name but a few.

In June 2012, the committee organized its first conference in Faroe Islands. The topic was timely and well suited for the location: Hunting and protecting of marine mammals – a clash of cultures? In the past few decades, scientific research has deepened our understanding of marine mammals and their advanced communication abilities. New knowledge and insight have changed public perception in profound ways, and has called for protection of these animals. Also, there has been objection to the hunting methods of whales and seals for causing too much animal suffering. Consequently small communities

in the North Atlantic and the Arctic have been deeply affected. The livelihood of marine mammals is threatened not only by hunting, but also by pollution of the North Atlantic and the Arctic, and climate change may have unforeseen consequences for marine mammals in this part of the world in near future.

To discuss these important issues, the Nordic Committee on Bioethics invited a broad range of experts for an open dialogue, involving disciplines such as medicine, biology, ethics, anthropology, physiology, and zoology, as well as people active fighting for animal rights, and stakeholders from those communities in the Nordic countries that have been hit the hardest by the change in public opinion. The committee hopes it has succeeded in presenting a balance between different views on this sensitive topic.

This conference summary, compiled by Helena von Troil, highlights the main themes of the conference. The committee hopes that it will be resourceful for everyone interested in the topic, and that the conference served as an important contribution to Nordic dialogue on marine mammals.

Salvör Nordal
Chair 2012
Nordic Committee on Bioethics



(PHOTO: ALAN BROCKIE)

The Faroese Minister of Fisheries, Jacob Vestergaard

Förord

Nordisk kommitté för bioetik har till syfte att främja samarbete i bioetiska frågor mellan de nordiska länderna. Genom att sammanföra experter och företrädare för skilda perspektiv på dessa frågor vill man sprida kunskap, gynna samsyn, underlätta politiska beslut och i internationella sammanhang förmedla ett nordiskt perspektiv på bioetikens utmaningar. Kommittén har genom åren arrangerat ett stort antal konferenser med fokus på medicinsk etik, etisk genetik och miljöetik i syfte att stimulera till dialog mellan olika forskningsområden och intressenter. Ett brett spektrum av frågor har belysts, såsom psykisk hälsa, stamcells forskning, reproduktionsteknologi, biobanker, bioetisk pedagogik samt havens bioetik, för att bara nämna några exempel.

I juni 2012 genomförde kommittén för första gången en konferens på Färöarna. Ämnet var väl lämpat för denna miljö: ”Jakt och skydd av marina däggdjur – en kulturkrock?” Under senare decennier har forskningen fördjupat vår förståelse av de marina däggdjuren och deras högt utvecklade kommunikationsförmåga. Nya kunskaper och insikter har radikalt förändrat allmänhetens attityder i frågan och väckt krav på skydd av dessa djur. Kritik har också riktats mot jaktmetoderna vid val- och säljakt, vilka ansetts alltför plågsamma för djuren. Detta i sin tur har fått djupgående konsekvenser för ett antal mindre samhällen i Nordatlanten och Arktis. Men de marina däggdjurens överlevnad

hotas inte bara av jakt, utan också av de föroreningar som drabbar Nordatlanten och Arktis. Även klimatförändringar kan komma att få oanade konsekvenser för havens djurliv i denna del av världen inom en nära framtid.

För att befrämja en öppen dialog om dessa problem samlade Nordisk kommitté för bioetik under konferensen experter från ett flertal vetenskapsområden såsom medicin, biologi, etik, antropologi, fysiologi och zoologi. Även personer engagerade i djurrättsfrågor var representerade, liksom företrädare för de grupper inom Norden vars livsstil starkast påverkats av den växande kritiken mot jakt på marina däggdjur. Kommitténs förhoppning är att på ett balanserat sätt kunna lyfta fram olika förhållningssätt till denna känsliga och kontroversiella fråga.

Denna rapport, som är sammanställd av Helena von Troil, belyser konferensens viktigaste teman. Kommittén hoppas att den ska bli användbar för alla intresserade och att konferensen har fungerat som ett viktigt bidrag till de nordiska ländernas dialog om marina däggdjur.

Salvör Nordal
Ordförande 2012
Nordisk kommitté för bioetik
Översättning: Sara Larsson



PHOTO: NIKOLAJ BOCK/NORDEN.ORG

Background and future

In 2005, The Nordic Committee on Bioethics (NCBio) held a meeting in Bergen on the bioethics of the sea. This was followed by a joint meeting of The Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture of The Nordic Council of Ministers and the NCBio in Stockholm in 2008 on illegal and uncertified fishing. Subsequently, the Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture suggested that the committee and NCBio would hold a joint workshop or conference on the issues of marine mammals. The main goal was to analyse the tension between the “two cultures” in the north regarding killing and utilization vs. preservation of sea mammals. The workshop would attempt to understand the background, underlying beliefs, moral arguments and values behind the contrasting views, and address issues such as animal management and welfare in a and philosophical perspective, and also the cultural and economic importance of whaling and sealing in Nordic communities.

The conference *Hunting and Protections of Marine Mammals – a Clash of Cultures?* was held in the Faroe Islands in June 2012. The Faroe Islands were chosen as a venue, in part because of its history of pilot whaling. In this small society of nearly 50.000 people, who for centuries have lived in a quite harsh oceanic environment, whale consumption has been one of the locally available natural resources, which has enabled them to maintain a relatively high degree of self-sufficiency in food production. Whale catches are shared without the exchange of money among the participants in the whale drive and residents of the local district, where they are landed. The whale meat and blubber from pilot whales is a valued part of the national diet. The same has been true for seal hunting in Greenland.

Over the last three decades there have been serious debate and criticism against whale hunting. Many meetings and conferences have been held to study this issue, but the discussion on this hot topic has often been polarized to an extent that real dialogue has been difficult. In order to promote a more nuanced dialogue and identify the key issues, the Nordic Committee on Bioethics arranged this conference, and gave room for many different and interesting perspectives. At the conference participants aired and reasoned their views on the questions of how to best manage and protect marine mammals. It showed that fruitful dialogue is possible on hot topics on whaling and seal hunting and that better understanding can be reached. Unfortunately an anthropologist, who should have spoken about why whale and seal hunting has become an ethical issue, was not able to attend the conference.

Following the conference The Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture of The Nordic Council of Ministers has now commissioned a report from The Centre for Ethics, University of Iceland, on the ethical issues and the public attitude towards the hunting of marine mammals. This report will critically analyse Nordic attitudes both pro and against the hunting of marine mammals in order to throw light on how and why the prevailing opinions have taken the shape they have. In particular, the report will identify ethical issues at stake in the light of key perspectives within environmental ethics and evaluate their coherence.

Ange Vilhjálmur Árnason

Salvör Nordal



PHOTO: IMAGESELECT

Realities of coastal cultures and rhetoric of preservation:

Marine mammal controversies and the need for constructive dialogue

“I come from the east coast of Iceland. When I was young, I went fishing with my father and I also spent some time seal hunting. I grew up in a very strong fishing culture, but I am also trained as an anthropologist. The arctic region is my speciality”, began Niels Einarsson. In his talk he discussed the interplay between traditional local attitudes and the receptiveness and adaptation to an alternative and commercialised way of using marine resources. This can also be seen as a study of local impacts of globalisation and how international trends affect local communities.

Whale watching

As a point of departure Einarsson used an anthropological case study on the introduction of whale-watching in Husavík in Iceland. The whale watching operating out of Húsavík, a small town in northeast-

ern Iceland, is in many ways a success story, contributing to the community’s economy and supporting livelihoods. “Yet, this achievement is by no means to be taken for granted in a community which has traditionally, as other Icelandic fishing communities,



PHOTO: ALAN BROCKIE



PHOTO: IMAGESELECT

viewed whales as marine resources, of consumptive rather than of visual and experiential value”, he said.

“ *I think there is a need for an open dialogue on animal rights ...*”

Whale watching in Húsavík has been very successful and is today a thriving business. In 1995 whale watching was an alien thought to the people of Húsavík. Today 55,000 people per year go whale watching contributing 4.8 million euros to the economy.

The image of whales

The public image of whales in the western world has changed dramatically since the 1970’s. “This transformation in perceptions is driven by a group of whale conservationists. One of their methods is to humanize the whales. They emphasize the sentimental, positive anthropomorphism. Thus the animal becomes an entity with moral rights”, said Einarsson. “This has resulted in a process of creative, yet forced, adaptation and alternative use of the marine environment and its animals.”

The introduction of whale watching in Húsavík has been relatively uncontroversial Einarsson pointed out. It was not introduced as a way of preserving whales but as a form of coastal culture. This is an example of pragmatic conservation which takes into account local peoples’ wishes and traditions.

Cultural mediators

“The role of certain local individuals as cultural mediators, able to deal effectively with conflicting cultural perceptions and seascape constructions, was crucial in the initial introduction, dialogue and continued viability of whale viewing in the community”, said Einarsson. This is a lesson to be taken further, not least with regard to wider but often problematic questions of adaptability, and constructive transformability in northern coastal communities.

“I think there is a need for an open dialogue on animal rights, human rights, the ethics of harvesting or hunting and ecosystem impacts. We have to discuss the symbolism and different cultural perceptions of marine mammals and the meaning of this for the politics of conservation and use, both consumptive and non-consumptive. The debate should be widened to include alternative solutions. The successful cases of introducing whale watching in Húsavík might be something we can learn from”, Einarsson concluded. ■

The international dialogue and Nordic practices of hunting

In his overview, Lars Walløe commented on the characteristics of the whaling debate. “My background makes me perhaps prejudiced since I am one of the parties in the discussion. I have represented the Norwegian government in the whaling issues since the 1980’s”, he said.

The debate

Walløe divided the debate into two categories. The first type of debate can be observed in connection to bilateral discussions or international negotiations. The second is the public debate, conducted mainly in the media. The whaling debate has continued on and off for more than a century. It became hot in the early 1990’s and has since been declining. “The public debate hasn’t really been a dialogue but

rather a polarized argumentation. In scientific fora the dialogue has been better informed and more constructive”, said Walløe. In the whaling debate two different kinds of arguments are used – the resource arguments and the animal welfare arguments.

Resource arguments

According to Walløe the resource arguments can in turn be divided into arguments on stock identity and



PHOTO: IMAGESELECT

abundance, time trends in abundance and concerns for fish stocks. The resource argument was first raised in 1902 by the Norwegian marine biologist Johan Hjort. Walløe quoted Hjort: “In my opinion, too many blue whales and fin whales are being caught at present. It seems clear to me that the whale populations in the seas around the northernmost parts of Norway are being appreciably affected by whaling, particularly where blue whales and fin whales are concerned. What is more, the notion that the oceans contain extraordinarily large numbers of whales is in my view a great exaggeration. I believe that by continuing to take the same number of whales as at present, we will cause their populations to decrease year by year, because they cannot breed fast enough to maintain the number of individuals.”

“Whale species are, in my opinion, not different from other large mammal species.”

Sixteen species of whale are today encountered in the North Atlantic. Six of them are hunted. Whale stocks are continuously monitored. Improved methods for estimating the size of whale stocks were developed by Norwegian scientists in the 1980–1990’s. After 1995 their method for counting has been accepted internationally. “Today there are at least a 100 000 minke whales in the North Atlantic, and the Norwegian hunt is definitely sustainable”, said Walløe.

Animal welfare arguments

Walløe listed three categories of animal welfare arguments in the debate. The first category is comparison with other big game hunting operations. “In comparison with the hunting of for instance elk and reindeer, whale hunting is more efficient”, Walløe pointed out. Studies show that the proportion of instant death in whale hunting has increased from approximately twenty percent in 1981 to eighty percent today. This is due to the use of a grenade harpoon and to improved hunting methods. Also, in whale hunting no hit individual escapes alive because a rope is attached to the harpoon.

The second category is comparison with slaughtering of domestic animals. Walløe stated that it is a myth that killing in abattoirs always is instantaneous. The percentage of animals which are not killed instantaneously is of the same order of magnitude for large domestic animals in abattoirs as in the Norwegian whaling. In addition the domestic animals experience fright and stress during the transportation from the farm to the abattoir. Such stress is absent in the Norwegian whaling.

According to the last type of arguments whales have special mental abilities (e.g. intelligence, emotions), which motivate that they should have special protection. “Whale species are, in my opinion, not different from other large mammal species. I don’t see that the killing of whales is a serious issue when discussing animal welfare. Many domestic animals are treated much worse”, said Walløe. ■



PHOTO: IMAGESELECT

The threat of pollution to humans – and whales

The Faroese population suffers adverse health effects caused by environmental pollutants in the whale meat and blubber that is consumed, declared Pál Weihe. He gave a presentation on the health effects of hunting and consuming whale products.

Effects on humans

“Consuming meat and blubber from pilot whale causes mixed exposures”, said Weihe. “There is methylmercury in the meat and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in the blubber.”

“Environmental contaminants of the blubber adversely affect the immune system of children who eat blubber so that their reaction to vaccinations is weaker than normal”, continued Weihe. “Those adults who often eat pilot whale products appear to run an increased risk of developing Parkinson’s disease. This is probably due to contaminants in the meat.”

“*Pilot whales contain toxic contaminants in such concentrations that neither meat nor blubber would comply with current limit values.*”

Mercury from pilot whale meat adversely affects the fetal development of the nervous system. This has been shown in studies in the Faroe Islands. The mercury effect is still detectable during adolescence. It has also been shown that the mercury from the mother’s diet affects the blood pressure of the children and that the risk of hypertension and arteriosclerosis is increased in adults who have an increased exposure to mercury.

The good news is that the mercury concentration has fallen in pregnant women in the Faroe Islands because pregnant women have followed advice not

to consume whale. The alternative is to eat cod, which has only a fraction of the mercury concentration in whale.

Mercury

The concentration of mercury in the oceans has increased and e.g. polar bears now have a mercury concentration in the hair that is about ten times higher than before. The latest analyses show that the mercury concentration of pilot whale remains high with an average of about two micrograms mercury per gram whale meat. In the European Union, the highest limit value of one microgram per gram is only applicable to the most contaminated species of fish. In most pilot

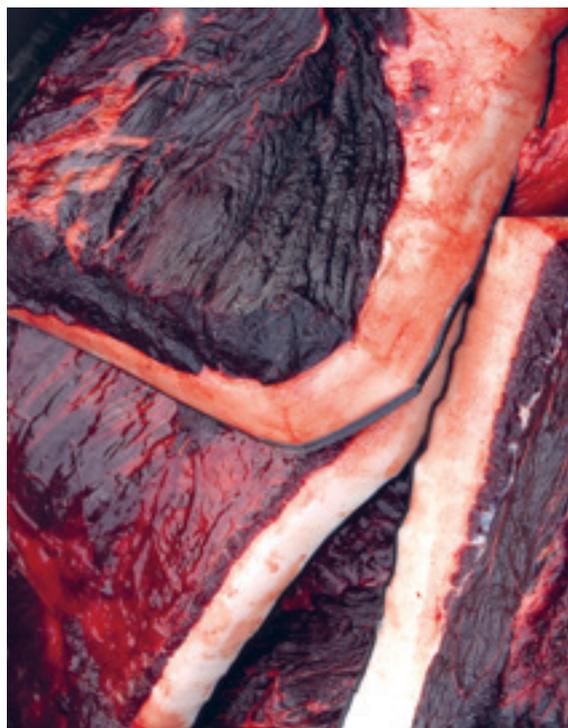


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PHOTO: IMAGESELECT

whales this limit is exceeded. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's limit for total dietary intake of mercury is 0.1 microgram mercury per kilogram body weight. Thus an adult person weighing 70 kg can consume only 3.5 gram of pilot whale meat per day to reach the limit value, Weihe explained.

Other pollutants

"Pilot whales contain toxic contaminants in such concentrations that neither meat nor blubber would comply with current limit values", said Weihe. Blubber contains high levels of several persistent organic compounds, such as PCBs and DDE (dichlorodiphenyldichloroethylene), which is a breakdown product of the insecticide DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane). The average concentrations of both PCB and DDE are higher than 10 microgram per

gram of blubber. Regarding PCB, there are several limit values, most of them being below 1 microgram per gram. In addition, new toxic compounds such as the polyfluorinated compounds (PFC's) that are used for textile impregnation are now found in increased concentrations in the blood of children, who eat pilot whale.

In conclusion Weihe said: "It is wrong that children in the Faroe Islands have suffered health effects from consuming whale meat and organs. My message to the industrialized nations who have polluted the world's seas is: you have done harm to our children due to environmental pollutants. Something has to be done about that. This is my ethical statement of today." ■

Global warming, environmental changes and marine mammals

Johann Sigurjónsson, a whale expert by training, talked about the seas around Iceland being a large scale laboratory for climate impact research. He discussed past and future ocean climate shifts and their effects on marine life and marine mammals in the North.

Iceland as a large laboratory

Sigurjónsson began by pointing out that the surface sea temperature around Iceland varies a lot. In summer the variation ranges from +10 to -1 degrees with a marked geographic variability. Sea temperature changes north of Iceland in the period 1952–2010 show a decrease in temperature between 1952 and 1970 and an increasing trend starting around 1995. “We are now in the midst of a warmer period”, said Sigurjónsson. “But this is not due to global warming, it has been warm before. In Iceland global warming will be much smaller in degrees than is the natural annual fluctuation.”

Fish stocks vary depending on water temperature. Some fish species benefit from warmer sea water other species suffer. “The warmer sea conditions in the last ten to fifteen years have led to changes in stocks, distribution and migration of fish like haddock, monkfish, herring and mackerel. The stocks of capelin, which is a very important species, has been low recently due to warming of the waters”, said Sigurjónsson.

Global warming in the Arctic area

“The increase in temperature caused by global warming will be higher in the Arctic area compared to the global mean”, continued Sigurjónsson. This has been shown in the climate reports Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA, 2005) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

“Winters in the North will be up to seven degrees warmer. But there will be great regional variations due to the topography of the sea bottom floor and currents. The Arctic ice cover will shrink dramatically and vast continental shelf areas in the Arctic Ocean

will open up. New sailing routes will become possible and large shallow water areas will open up forming productive fishing grounds. The decrease in ice cover will be a direct threat to polar bears and other ice dependent animals. It is estimated that in 2050



PHOTO: JOHANNES JANSSON/NORDEN.ORG

two thirds of the polar bear population will be under threat.”

Stocks of arctic marine mammals are impacted also by a number of secondary factors when the temperatures rise and the ice cover shrinks. Sigurjónsson mentioned the influence from human activities such as sea transport and tourism, chemical pollution and changing prey availability. Unreliable ice refuges, competition for food and space and predation form further threats to the animals.

In conclusion Sigurjónsson said that history and basic knowledge of the biology of the northern stocks

of fish and sea mammals help us understand potential future scenarios generated by climate change at high latitudes. Model predictions and recent events indicate that dramatic changes will take place in the Arctic Ocean during this century. The changes will generally have serious negative impacts on ice cover dependent species such as polar bears. They will have negative impacts on ice associated arctic species like narwhal and beluga, lesser so on sub-arctic migratory species like harp seals. The changes will have a positive impact on seasonally migrating sub-arctic species like fin, minke and killer whales. ■

“ *The increase in temperature caused by global warming will be higher in the Arctic area compared to the global mean.*”

Research on whales

Dorete Bloch gave an overview of the research on marine mammals done at the Museum of Natural History in Tórshavn. One focus for the research is on whales and whaling in the Faroe Islands.

“We do whale research because the animals and hunting them is an important feature in the Faroese culture”, she said. “There are four main areas in the research. We study the biology of the various hunted whale species. Secondly, we look at how whales can be hunted sustainably. The third area is to analyse the hunting pressure. That is the intensity of the hunting measured in proportion of the total population of animals in the area. The last research area is analysing the killing time.” The killing time is defined as the time it takes from the moment the animal has been hit to fix the animal and to actually kill it.

Five species of whales and dolphins are hunted in the Faroe Islands. They are long-finned pilot whales (*Globicephala melas*), bottlenose whales (*Hyperoodon ampullatus*), white-sided dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus acutus*), bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) and harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*).

Research methods

The North Atlantic Sightings Surveys is an important research tool. They have been conducted five times, in 1987, 1989, 1995, 2001 and in 2007. These surveys cover at maximum the whole area from the Norwegian coast in the east to the west coast of Greenland and New Foundland in the west. As a result, the scientists have been able to define the population distribution of the various whale species as well as the population sizes in different areas.

By satellite tagging the pilot whales the researchers have mapped the animal’s movements in detail. It is also possible to see how deep they dive and how long they stay under water. The majority of the animals dive only to 16–40 meters’ depth, but some go over 600 meters down. Usually the whales stay under water for one to two minutes. Some stay for more than fifteen minutes.

Hunting methods

In the Faroes approximately 700 whales, mainly long-finned pilot whales, are killed annually. The hunts are non-commercial and they are organised on community level, which means that anyone in the community can participate. The hunt begins when a school of whales is sighted close to land. Weather conditions permitting, the school is driven ashore the animals are fixed and finally killed with a hook inserted in the blowing hole of the animal. Two different models of hooks are used. The traditional hook is a sharp pointed hook. A newer model is blunt and instead of being sharp pointed it has a knob at the end. “We have shown that using the traditional whale hook the mean killing time is almost sixty six seconds, whereas using the blunted hook it is only twenty seconds”, said Bloch.

Statistics on pilot and bottlenose whale hunting is available in the Faroe Islands from as early as 1584. It shows that the hunting pressure varied between 0 and 0,4 % until 1947. In 1948 the hunting pressure reached a peak at 0,6 % and after that it declined again. The long term average being 0,1 %. “With a pilot whale population today of 778 000 individuals the whale hunting in the Faroe Islands can certainly be considered sustainable”, concluded Dorete Bloch. ■



PHOTO: IMAGESELECT

“All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others” – Modern urban thinking versus traditional hunting culture?

Rasmus Ole Rasmussen is a specialist in regional development, regional analysis and Arctic and Northern regions. He discussed the perceptions of what is, and what is not, good to eat and the social construction of what is acceptable.

What is “not good to eat”

As an opening to the discussion Rasmussen pointed to an issue that for some people is very critical – the concept of halal, which means good. “Dabīhah (ذَبْحٌ بِدَا) is the prescribed method of slaughtering animals according to Islamic law. If it is not applied the animal is ‘not good to eat’.”

Similar to the Islamic law also Jews have strict rules for what is good and not good to eat. The word “kashrut” (kosher) means fit, proper or correct, Rasmussen explained.

Kosher slaughter, Shechita, is similar to the slaughtering method conducted according to Islamic law. The rationale behind it is that by cutting the throat and leaving the animal to bleed the meat contains no blood clots. This gives the meat a longer shelf life which is appropriate in the warm Middle East climate.

“So, are seals and whales good to eat?” asked Rasmussen then. With respect to Islamic law there is no conclusive answer. According to the Hanafi madhab (a Sunni school of legal thought in Islam), of all water creatures only fish are acceptable to eat. Thus the seal, being a carnivorous mammal, is not permissible. On the other hand there is a hadith saying: “Its (the sea) water is pure and its dead (animals) are lawful.” According to this the seal would be halal and the same would apply for the whale, also being a carnivorous mammal. There is actually a Sahih hadith (trustworthy memory) where the prophet Muhammad ate whale.

According to the Torah, of the “beasts of the earth” you may eat any animal that has cloven hooves and chews its cud. This means that ruminants are acceptable but all other land mammals are not. Of the “things that are in the waters”, you may eat anything that has fins and scales. Consequently, seal and whale food products are not kosher.

Rasmussen continued with examples of food that in some areas is considered unsuitable for human consumption and in other areas quite acceptable. In Russia dry and frozen whale and seal meat is sold in stalls and shops, even in the center of St. Petersburg. Local animals are sold and eaten both in small and large scale in Africa, e.g. seal meat from Namibia. Biltongs, which is cured meat products from wildlife including seals from South Africa and Namibia, is consumed locally and also exported to Australia. In China, consumption of sea mammals is common both in rural areas and in large towns. Meat from bear and caribou is consumed in the North Western territories in Canada and also available in the Nordic countries. In Canada however, access is restricted, as according to regulations the meat cannot be sold. It can only be acquired through exchange. In countries like Greenland, Iceland, Faroe Islands and Norway food products from marine mammals are available, either from the hunters themselves, or sold in shops.

A social and cultural construction

“What is acceptable or unacceptable is a social and cultural construction”, said Rasmussen, and reflected on when one’s own social and cultural



PHOTO: RASMUS OLE RASMUSSEN



PHOTO: RASMUS OLE RASMUSSEN

“What is acceptable or unacceptable is a social and cultural construction.”

constraints are imposed on others. Such behavior can lead to conflicts. The International Whaling Commission (IWC) rules allow hunting where there is a nutritional and cultural need. Animal welfare campaigners say, however, that for instance Greenland’s whaling, conducted according to IWC rules permitting subsistence hunting, has become too commercial. The World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) found that a quarter of the 2011 catch of whale was traded for profit through a private food company. And the Greenland whale hunt has been called ‘commercial’ by Richard Black, BBC’s environment correspondent. In the Greenlandic perspective commercial sale, however, simply enables a larger part of the population to enjoy the nutritional qualities of the marine mammals and

thus the traditional food is maintained as a part of subsistence.

“Does modern urban thinking contrast against traditional hunting culture”, asked Rasmussen. “Well, if you have access to the animals and food products and know the resources you can understand the qualities of availability. This is closely connected to tradition. Experience and knowledge is important. Knowledgeable people can distinguish between what is human life and what is animal life, and enjoy and accept the qualities of tradition.” ■

Animal protection

Siri Martinsen, who is a veterinarian by training, discussed the Norwegian whaling and how people regard the exploitation of animals and animal welfare. She also commented on the idea that animal protection is an urban phenomenon and a result of the longer distance between animals and humans in today's society.



“*The Norwegian government claims that killing methods are humane ...*”

Whaling in Norway

“Norway is described as a whaling country”, said Martinsen. “The Norwegian government claims that killing methods are humane, although twenty percent of the animals struggle for a longer period of time before death. But there are many Norwegians that would rather see Norway as a pioneer in animal welfare and not as a country clinging on to old enterprises resulting in animal suffering”. Martinsen also

criticized the hunting methods used in commercial whaling and said that the margins of error are too high and the animals suffer.

Extending compassion

“Why has hunting and protection of marine mammals become an ethical dilemma”, was one of the questions to be discussed. Martinsen said that she prefers to formulate the question in a different way: Why should animals matter? And to be more specific: Why is the infliction of pain, suffering or death to animals something which humans should be concerned about? “Humans exploit animals in many ways. We inflict pain and suffering for a large number of reasons“, she said. “The ethical dilemma of hunting versus protection is essentially

a question about who we extend our compassion to. Who do we consider worthy of our concern and protection?”

A clash of cultures

Siri Martinsen then commented on the whaling debate. An argument used for the abolishment of whaling is, that hunting whales may again lead to endangered stocks. Another is that the hunting of whales is itself ethically unacceptable, because whales are highly developed, social animals and the methods used to kill whales are old fashioned and inhumane.

“The ethical dilemma of hunting versus protection is essentially a question about who we extend our compassion to.”

On the other hand, those in favour of continued whale hunting often claim that for the Nordic countries in the North Atlantic region, whale and seal meat together with blubber have been an important part of the diet for centuries. It is also claimed that the killing methods over the last decades have been adapted to modern standards of animal welfare.

An often heard view in the current whaling discussion is, that in general the people and environmental organisations who are against the hunting of marine mammals, come from large modern urban centres far from the small coastal communities practicing this hunting. Many consider this to be a sign of a clash of cultures between traditional and modern society.

“Who do we consider worthy of our concern and protection?”

Siri Martinsen was critical to this way of thinking. “The issue of hunting marine mammals is not about urban society versus rural society. It is not even about being modern or traditional. Traditions involving fear, pain or other negative emotions for animals are widespread”, she said.

“They are not limited to coastal, agricultural or urban cultures, not to small or big cultures, not to modern or ancient.”

Martinsen said that humans have demonstrated an ability to disregard the interests of other beings as long as our history is recorded. “However, we also have demonstrated the continuous ability to reconsider our actions, to change our considerations, to care. The ability to do this is, of course, not limited to any culture or time. There are cultures and times where the discussion of these matters is more difficult or easier, for different reasons. The individuals with ability to question our treatment of animals is not a stereotype, but may as well be born in a big city tomorrow as in a small whaling town in Norway when whaling was still at its peak”, said Martinsen.

She ended by quoting Aage Krarup Nielsen, a doctor on a whaling vessel that set out from Sandefjord. In 1921 he described the whales dragging the ship behind them and remarked: “... it cannot be denied that in these circumstances the poor animal is subjected to great suffering”. ■

The implications for Greenland of the EU policy on sealing and whaling

Amalie Jessen has dealt with marine resources, especially mammals, for more than twenty years. She has been involved in the work of a number of international organisations, including the International Whaling Commission, IWC and the North Atlantic Mammal Commission, NAMMCO. “From the very beginning, I have noticed that some people’s attitudes to marine mammals are based on emotions and misinformation, not on facts”, she said.



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“*Sealing in Greenland is severely affected by decisions and domestic politics in the European Union.*”

300,000 sealskins are stored in Greenland. The sealskin tannery’s turnover has been reduced from 63 million DKK in 2005 to 9.1 million DKK in 2011 and the number of employees from seventy two to thirty eight.

Sealing

“Sealing in Greenland is severely affected by decisions and domestic politics in the European Union”, stated Jessen. Greenland is a third party to the Danish membership in EU. “This fact makes the situation complicated, especially regarding marine mammals.”

“Decisions regarding sealing in the EU, for instance the trade ban of seal products from 2010, have been based on emotions”, she said. The EU regulation contains limited exemptions for products resulting from Inuit hunts, from hunts conducted solely to manage marine resources, and for travellers’ personal imports. “The Inuit exemption has had no effect. We have realised that there is very little or no knowledge about the EU ban and especially the Inuit exemption.”

The EU ban has had serious consequences for revenue and employment in Greenland. Today more than

Whaling

Internationally whaling is regulated by the International Whaling Commission (IWC). The Commission was set up under the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling from 1946. The purpose of the convention is to provide for the proper conservation of whale stocks and to make possible the orderly development of the whaling industry. Membership of the IWC is open to any country in the world that formally adheres to the 1946 Convention. Currently the IWC has 89 members.

Amalie Jessen pointed out that while EU cannot, as such, be a member of IWC it is powerful also in this forum. This is because twenty three EU member states are also members of the IWC. These states have adopted a common EU position on certain whaling issues. “This has had a severe impact on Greenland”, she said.



PHOTO: IMAGESELECT

Decisions based on emotions and misinformation

“The commercialization of people’s feelings in the media and social media seems to be more commercial than the commercial whaling and sealing industry we know today”, said Jessen.

“Without whales and seals in NGO’s websites, many environmental organisations would not exist. In our Department we have the clear opinion that challenges and problems have to be sorted out within the relevant organisations and between partners by equal dialogue and mutual understanding. This is not the case today.”

Pragmatic whaling and sealing nations

Jessen also emphasised that all whaling and sealing nations hunt according to the precautionary princi-

ple. They have implemented appropriate management measures and use effective killing methods. She stressed the importance of a sound ecosystem based management of all living resources. “The increasing numbers of whales and seals in our seas are the biggest competitors to our fishermen and hunters”, she said.

“I have with regret observed the current development in Europe. A few countries within the EU are in the process of destroying the possibility of the IWC to live up to its convention and introducing trade restrictions. These initiatives have, and will have, severe negative consequences for our hunters, their families and their livelihood”, concluded Jessen. ■

Perspectives of the Nordic Council of Ministers

Geir Oddsson gave an overview of the institutional structure of and decision making processes in the Nordic Council of Ministers, NCM. He mentioned some marine mammal projects supported by NCM and gave brief summaries of two minister declarations on marine mammals adopted by the council.

Nordic co-operation

Nordic co-operation on the use and conservation of living marine resources is the responsibility of one of the eleven councils of ministers within the NCM. This council is called the Ministerial Council for Fisheries and Aquaculture, Agriculture, Food and Forestry (MR-FJLS). Promoting the sustainable use of natural and genetic resources is the main task of the council. The

council's work is based on framework programmes spanning over four years. Nordic co-operation is based on consensus and is generally very constructive. However, "the fact that of the five Nordic countries Norway and Iceland are not members of the European Union sometimes makes the work within the council on natural resource issues more challenging", said Oddsson.

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PHOTO: SILJE BERGUM KINSTEN/NORDEN.ORG



Under the Council of Ministers there is the Committee of Senior Officials for Fisheries and Aquaculture (EK-FJLS). Its members represent the various responsible ministries of the member countries. And under EK-FJLS there is a working group on fisheries and aquaculture (AG-Fisk), with members from various Nordic institutions. The focus of the cooperation is on networking and coordination within the fisheries and aquaculture sectors as well as coordination with neighbouring countries. “The projects supported by EK-FJLS must involve at least three of the five member countries, have a Nordic utility aspect and they should be politically relevant”, said Oddsson.

Projects on marine mammals

Approximately twenty projects on marine mammals have been supported by the Council of Ministers over the last ten years. Oddsson mentioned the Status Report on Bowhead Whales – at the edge of extinction in the Northeast Atlantic from 2003 and a project on the migration and ecology of baleen whales from the Azores to Nordic waters from 2006. The NCM supported the expert meeting on the health effects of eating whale and seal organised by NAMMCO in 2007. In 2009 NCM supported three projects: A report on the ethics of sea mammals management, a workshop on handling, processing and utilization of hunted marine mammals and a project on the estimation of the spatial distribution and abundance of harbor porpoises in the Baltic Sea.

Two declarations on marine mammals

To emphasize what is politically important and give political direction minister declarations are some-

times adopted. In recent years two declarations on marine mammals have been adopted, one together with ministers from the three Baltic States in 2006 and another one by the Nordic ministers in 2008.

In The Nordic-Baltic Ministerial Declaration on the grey seals in the Baltic Sea the ministers express their concern of the socio-economic development of the coastal communities. They are aware of the serious situation for the coastal fisheries and the need to find new ways to diversify the economic activities of the coastal communities. They are concerned that seals in some areas are a serious economic threat to the coastal fisheries, with consequences of reduced catches and destroyed fishing gears. The ministers emphasize the need to promote selective fishing techniques in order to avoid the incidental by-catches of seals.

In the Växjö Declaration on Seals and Society from 2008 the Nordic ministers are concerned about recent developments within the EU in the wake of the European Parliament’s declaration of a ban on trade in seal products within the Union. They say that this is a move which represents a serious threat to local food traditions and small-scale industries that use the seals as a resource. The ministers stress the importance of promoting balance between conservation and the use of seal stocks in the Baltic and North Atlantic and appeal to the European Commission to work to achieve such a balance that takes account of the interests of all stakeholders. ■

The spectacular aquarium: Local and global contexts and concerns

Gísli Pálsson introduced himself as an anthropologist interested in environmental issues, animals and animal rights issues. In his talk he addressed some of the tensions between local and global practices and concerns, especially regarding human responsibility and the hunting of sea mammals. He focused on the oceans and the human condition in the Anthropocene, a period characterized by escalating anthropogenic impact on the environment. The Anthropocene is an informal geologic chronological term that serves to mark the evidence and extent of human activities that have had a significant global impact on the Earth's ecosystems (Wikipedia).

Discourse challenges

“While the tensions between local and global practices and concerns regarding the responsibility of humans and the hunting of sea mammals need to be addressed in a democratic, culture-sensitive fashion, this is easier said than done”, stated Pálsson. He said that one of the challenges relates to the fact that inevitably we are firmly embedded in the house we must manage. Another challenge is that of multi-species sensibilities. Pálsson also mentioned that recently the global environmental discourse has tended to extend the community of sentient, fellow beings not only to other primates but also to a whole range of other beings, including sea mammals, insects, and even plants. This development implies serious bioethical concerns with routine practices of killing and consumption. At the same time, however, the growing global human population is desperately in need of expanding available sources of food. “How can this dilemma be reconciled, minimizing suffering, attending to local as well as global concerns, and respecting both the importance and limits of relativism?”, he asked.

Pálsson showed a cover picture from the New Yorker, 1997. In the picture, a group of lobsters sit in a seaside restaurant studying the menu. There is an aquarium with humans in it in the corner of the room. “This is a very powerful image with a strong environ-

mental message and the metaphor is good. It goes beyond the modernist perspective of the relation between humans and nature and erases the divide between nature and society”, he said.



FIGURE 1 COVER DRAWING “LOBSTERMAN’S SPECIAL” BY BRUCE MCCALL
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“A new age in geology and geopolitics has begun.”

PHOTO: IMAGESELECT

The Anthropocene

“A new age in geology and geopolitics has begun”, said Pálsson. We have a new situation where humans are fundamentally refashioning the entire ecosystem of Earth and its resources. At the same time we need to allow space also for other species. Humans are the only species aware of this process. “In this anthropogenic society there is a need for global governance of resources”, he said. This has led to tensions between cultural representations and local needs. As an example Pálsson mentioned the tension between the image of the “super” whale with anthropocentric features and the needs, practices and traditions of indigenous communities.

Pálsson ended by discussing the ocean in the Anthropocene. “We should respect differences and local tastes”, he said. “There are new sensibilities regarding animals and plants, even fish. The argument has been put forward that fish and plants can sense pain. Where does that lead us? We need to

decide on our priorities. To what extent can we use the ocean resources for human consumption? In 2050 nine billion humans have to be fed. To accomplish that, we need new sustainable ways of farming the oceans. Striking the balance is the geopolitics of the Anthropocene.” ■

Challenges for international cooperation on the conservation and management of marine mammals

Kate Sanderson put marine mammal hunting in a broader context by giving a brief overview of the recent history of international cooperation on sustainable development. She then commented on some of the major challenges in the continued debate.

History of international cooperation

“2012 is the twenty year anniversary of the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio, when the principle of sustainable development was firmly cemented as a basis for international cooperation in the use of natural resources” said Sanderson. “In the early 1970’s the ground-breaking Brundtland Commission report defined sustainable development in a way that has yet to be improved upon. The common aim was – and still is – to ensure a balance between human growth and development and the limited capacity of the earth’s ecosystems to sustain this development.”

At the same time, “saving whales” became a symbol of the broader cause of environmental protection. A majority of member countries of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) adopted a blanket ban on all commercial whaling in 1982, to come into effect from the 1986/87 whaling season. “Over the next decade, the anti-whaling rhetoric continued with a vengeance and no progress was made within the IWC to review its moratorium decision, despite the science and the fact that this decision was supposed to be reviewed by 1990 at the latest”, said Sanderson.

The North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO) was established in 1992 by the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland and Norway. Canada and Russia have been active observers to NAMMCO ever since, and Japan has also followed its work closely.

NAMMCO filled a gap in providing an international body for cooperation on the conservation and management of small whales and seals and walrus,

which is especially important for the Faroe Islands with regard to pilot whales. NAMMCO also coordinates the regular Trans-Atlantic sighting surveys of whales to map the distribution and abundance of the most important stocks in the region.

NAMMCO is as a regional forum where policy makers, scientists and the whalers and sealers can meet and exchange views and experiences on an equal footing. The basis of discussions is how best to ensure sustainable utilisation and best practices in management and hunting methods through the exchange of information and technology.

Challenges in the debate

“The discussion now needs to move away from defining marine mammal hunting as either commercial or subsistence/indigenous. That distinction undermines the globally accepted principle of sustainable utilisation, which should be the only criterion by which we judge whether a particular form of hunting is acceptable”, stressed Sanderson. “For the fishing nations of the North Atlantic, international trade is the basis of national economies. We have to challenge the assumption that whaling and sealing on a commercial basis for international trade will by definition lead to over-exploitation. The focus should be on ensuring sustainability, whether the resulting products are consumed locally for free or sold on national and international markets.”

Sanderson also called for greater demands for accountability and transparency in the work of special interest groups which have a mission to stop all marine mammal hunting. “Many of these groups are

not completely honest about their ultimate objectives and tend to dress their arguments in bogus scientific analysis”, she said. “Basic assumptions are seldom challenged by the media and politicians who are explicitly targeted with often very emotive material. These same organisations are the first to demand transparency and accountability on the part of governments and international bodies, but practice very little of the same in the way they work, and too often get away with claiming to represent the views of the ‘international community’”.

In conclusion, Sanderson pointed out that marine mammal hunting in the North Atlantic should not be seen as a dichotomy between “modern urban” and “traditional” lifestyles. The Faroes, for example, are modern and traditional at the same time – making

“ *The discussion now needs to move away from defining marine mammal hunting as either commercial or subsistence/indigenous.*”

money on global markets from trading marine resources and also sometimes sharing them out locally for free in traditional ways. The simple reality is that people understand where their food comes from, and are well aware that animals must be killed to provide food. ■



PHOTO: ALAN BROCKIE



PHOTOS: IMAGESELECT





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The conference *Hunting and Protection of Marine Mammals – a Clash of Cultures?* was held by the Nordic Committee on Bioethics in the Faroe Islands in June 2012, to discuss the growing dilemma regarding the rights of marine mammals, such as whales, with respect to the rights and interests of small fishing communities to continue practicing their traditional hunting methods.

A broad range of experts were invited for an open dialogue, involving disciplines such as medicine, biology, ethics, anthropology, physiology, and zoology, as well as people active fighting for animal rights, and stakeholders from those communities in the Nordic countries that have been hit the hardest by the change in public opinion.

This conference summary highlights the main themes of the conference. The committee hopes that it will be resourceful for everyone interested in the topic and will serve as an important contribution to Nordic dialogue on marine mammals.