

Animal Welfare in the Execution of Hunting of Whales

Egil Ole Øen (Wildlife Management Service)

More than 80 species and subspecies of whales are known and whales have been a natural source for food, heating and other necessities for mankind since times immemorial. Written sources describe whaling in Norway already in 890 and it still continues on a modest scale.

The public objections to hunting, and in particular whales, is mainly based on emotional concerns regarding the animal welfare associated with the killing and the possibility of endangering the populations due to overexploitation. No species have been eradicated by hunting even though some species were nearly depleted during the past industrial-type whaling. Whale stocks are growing and new management principles prevent overexploitation from hunting. However, the animal welfare associated with hunting must never be neglected. Emotions related to the killing will persist and must be taken seriously. Many are unfamiliar with hunting and slaughtering and identify with the animal and relate killing to their knowledge of the inevitability of death and its consequences. In 1980 The International Whaling Commission (IWC) encouraged member countries to start research to develop improved killing methods for whales. This initiated research in Japan and Norway, resulting in development of new types of harpoon grenades with the hypersonic explosive penthrite. Together with other modifications of hunting gears and intensified training of gunners the new grenades significantly improved the animal welfare. Also Greenland, Iceland, Alaska and Canada have introduced penthrite grenades in the hunt. Today the initiative by IWC to improve animal welfare associated with hunting is continued primarily by The North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO).