

SUSTAINABLE UTILISATION OF MARINE MAMMAL RESOURCES

The Question of Whaling

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June 5, 2006 - I was surprised to learn that efforts are afoot by some conservation groups to threaten Caribbean countries which support the sustainable utilization of marine mammal resources with reference to whale resources. Twenty years ago I was appointed as St. Lucia's Commissioner to the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and attended my first meeting in Sweden. At that time, some of the issues were the catch of the Minke whale in the coastal waters of Japan and Scientific Whaling.

As a scientist, before attending that meeting, I consulted with the head of the fisheries department of the US Government, a prominent UK fisheries scientist, and the Chairman of the IWC Scientific Committee about the scientific facts related to those issues. I was informed by all these individuals that the Minke whale in the coastal waters of Japan would not be endangered by a catch of 50 from the then existing population. I was also informed and I read in the IWC Scientific Committee reports that the IWC approved catches for scientific purposes would not endanger the particular whale stocks under consideration.

With this scientific advice from those credible sources, St. Lucia's votes at meetings were firmly based upon science, fully supported by reports from the IWC Scientific Committee findings and reports. Subsequently, at one of our meetings, I think it was in Scotland, a conservation group attempted to threaten the tourism industry of any Caribbean island which supported whaling of any whale stock regardless of species or sustainability. Some groups issued personal threats to Commissioners and proceeded to try to terrorize them and their countries in attempts to persuade them to change their vote regardless of the facts of science.

I am pleased to report that this attempt by observer groups to intimidate Commissioners by such unacceptable behavior was considered to be against the grain of international meetings and Commissioners without exception formally disassociated themselves with such deplorable acts. Caribbean countries must not be intimidated by such threats and I urge them to adhere to the facts of science as espoused by their own scientists, scientists from other national, regional and international institutions and the IWC Scientific Committee. Unfortunately, some time

ago, the Chairman of the IWC Scientific Committee resigned in protest over the lack of recognition of the facts of science in the deliberations of IWC meetings.

Much has been written about whales and whaling with particular reference to its sustainable utilization, but I wish to refer you to a paper of April 12, 1994, by D.W. Butterworth of the Department of Applied Mathematics of the University of Cape Town where he made reference to science based solutions to conservation problems as follows "President Clinton, when announcing his decision last October to delay the implementation of sanctions on Norway following that country's recommencement of commercial whaling, stated the United States' strong commitment to science-based international solutions to global conservation problems."

In the course of many presentations over the years, the plight of aboriginal peoples have been put forward where the social, economic, health, and tradition of those people have been articulated to demonstrate their needs. Unfortunately and sadly, those needs have been dismissed. Norway returned to commercial whaling after its scientists determined that their commercial activities would be in keeping with the sustainable utilization of their marine resources.

Caribbean countries, and indeed all countries, should adhere to the facts of science and the sustainable utilization of marine resources. Any terrorist threats should be documented and formally brought to the attention of the general body of IWC which has in the past dissociated itself from such action.

The IWC mantra should be the Sustainable Utilization of Marine Resources as guided by science. The catch of endangered stocks should be guided by recommendations of the IWC Scientific Committee and whale watching should be encouraged as an economic tourism exercise provided that the whales are not disturbed in their breeding environment.

I recommend that conservationists/environmentalists who are genuinely interested in the welfare of "whalekind" (a term often used by fanatics to equate humankind with "whale kind"), should look into the effect of pollution from industrialized countries on the habitat of whale stocks as well as the effect of sonar wave experiments on the death of marine mammals. I understand from published reports that the numbers of mammals stranded and dead through pollution and sonar experiments are staggering. I have been informed that a regulated catch of Minke whales in the coastal waters of Japan out of a population of several hundred thousand would not adversely affect the stock. Twenty years ago, the population was much less and scientists had pronounced that a catch of 50, which was the request of Japan at that time, would be in keeping with the sustainable utilization of that resource. Is this still a problem?

I note that there is a call for a secret ballot. This should be to the benefit some of the "like minded countries" which support the sustainable utilization of marine resources but which are constrained by political mandates. In the course of my many years attending IWC meetings, I met with a few Commissioners who lamented the fact that

they were not free to exercise their rational thinking based on the facts of science and who were strictly instructed to vote in one direction regardless of the arguments. The secret ballot may be to the advantage of Commissioners and countries which may not wish to be specifically identified. This would rescue them from the wrath of what appears to be some powerful and politically influential national groups.

It would appear that science is being more endangered than whales.

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