



NORWEGIAN WHALING

Background

In 1982, when the IWC adopted the moratorium on commercial whaling, Norway was one of the few governments to take a reservation to the decision. When the ban on commercial whaling came into effect in 1986, Norway initially undertook a small-scale scientific hunt of minke whales, but by 1993, Norway announced that it would resume commercial whaling. In 1994, Norway issued a quota for 319 minke whales, of which 203 animals were killed.

Prior to the decision banning commercial whaling, Norway killed approximately 2,000 minke whales per year, and more than 51% of the products from those kills were exported to Japan. Minke whaling in Norway is conducted by fishermen, the vast majority of whom engage in fishing for other species outside the whaling season. Vessels range in size from 50 to 80 feet. Quotas have risen in recent years, from 425 in 1996 to 1052 in 2008. However, the actual take has fallen far short of the quota and only once in the past ten years (2001), has the quota been met. The final take in 2008 was 535 minke whales, well short of the 1052 quota.

Distribution and pricing of Norwegian whale products

The Norges Råfisklag (The Norwegian Fishermen’s Sales Organisation) organises and arranges the sales of minke whales that are landed along the coast from Nordmøre to Finnmark. The Organisation has a well-developed service system and offers fishermen and buyers a number of services directly related to trading, sales and settlements. Whalers and buyers can make

direct mutual agreements in regard to supply; catches can be put up for auction on

the Organisation’s e-auction system; or longer-term contracts can be made. Not all whalers opt in to the Rafisklaget’s brokerage system; some larger whaling companies with their own vessels sell whale meat on their own.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Quota</i>	<i>Catch</i>
1998	671	625
1999	753	591
2000	655	487
2001	549	550
2002	671	634
2003	711	646
2004	670	541
2005	797	639
2006	1052	546
2007	1052	592
2008	1052	535

Since 1996, Norway has killed more than 8,000 minke whales. As noted above, the Norges Rafisklaget does not manage the landings of all whales killed; rather they handle roughly 80% of all minke whale landings. From 1996 to 2006, the Rafisklaget reported that they handled 6,417 tons of whale meat and less than 1000 tons of blubber.

Domestic sales of whale meat have continued to flag, and the largest potential export market, Japan, remains closed. By the end of summer 2007, the whale meat market was saturated, and only one buyer

expressed any interest in buying whale meat in August of 2007, and according to sources in the Norwegian fisheries industry, the whalers risked losses of up to 40 million kroner over the course of 2007 and 2008.

The minimum price set by the Rafisklaget (The Norwegian Fishermen's Sales Organisation) for whale meat has remained relatively stable over the past few years; however, in 2006, the Rafisklaget began to take a slightly different approach to the setting of prices for whale meat. The organisation noted that whale hunts began earlier in the season; as a result, it would offer two prices for whale meat based on seasonality. Prices offered to the whalers would drop down farther into the season.

The situation with blubber prices has been much different; as there is no domestic market in Norway for blubber for human consumption, large quantities of blubber from the hunts have been stockpiled, in anticipation of possible export to Japan. As Rafisklaget reports, "the price for blubber has varied strongly over the course of time, based on changing signals and reports on possible exports of such products to the main market in Japan."

Consumer prices for whale meat in Norway vary according to the quality/type of meat offered (ie. steaks versus stewing chunks), and also according to the company offering the product. In 2005, for example, the Myklebust Trading Company offered whale meat packages at 90kr/kg, and whale stewing chunks at 70kr/kg. By 2009, Myklebust's pricing had risen, with whale meat going for 110kr/kg.

Single kilo packs of frozen whale meat, produced by Karsten Ellingsen, have been sold for 94 kr/kilo. In restaurants, whale is



frozen whale meat packages

often available, especially in the north. Whale meat appetizers such as carpaccio can run for 105 kr, while entrees such as marinated whale beef and whale beef with game sauce go for 225 kr and 189 kr respectively.

Marketing

By 2000, consumption of whale meat in Norway had fallen to about .25kg/per capita a year. In response, the Fisheries Research Institute of Norway commissioned a focus group on the perceptions of whale meat as a food product in Norway. The study found that whale meat had an "old-time" image and was considered to be an exclusive product rather than a commonly eaten food stuff.

Focus group participants in large part said that they did not eat whale meat on a regular basis, that whale meat was seen as more expensive than other meats, and that it was considered to be a "political" food due to the whaling issue. The author of the study concluded that "whale meat needed a new image", and that efforts should be made to improve packaging and to disseminate information on how to prepare the product in more modern ways.

In 2005, the Karsten Ellingsen Company launched several new products based on whale meat, foremost among them the "Lofotburger". The burger, 50% minke whale and 50% pork, has gone on sale in dozens of supermarkets throughout Norway. The company also offers whale ham and pastrami. Ulf Ellingsen, spokesperson for the company, was clear about the rationale

behind the whale burger: “We hope that this product hits the nail on the head and that a new generation get their eyes opened up to whale meat.”

However, these efforts by Ellingsen seem to have failed. In March of 2008, Ulf Ellingsen announced that the company was considering cutting out sales of whale meat, as it was making more money from salmon aquaculture than from whaling, and was having difficulties freeing up labor to process the whale products. As the Ellingsen company takes about 30% of the whale meat each year, this could have a dramatic effect on the industry. Yet another whale meat buyer, the Hopen Fiske & Sild company of Vagan, Norway declared bankruptcy in October of 2008.

The Norges Rafisklaget, (The Norwegian Fishermen's Sales Organisation) began an extensive marketing and pr campaign in 2006, in an effort to promote whale meat consumption in Norway, (*Reklameutvalget for smahvalkjøtt*). The organisation charges whalers 30 ore, and buyers 50 ore for each kilo of whale meat that is sold in districts that fall within the Rafisklaget's management area. In addition, the Rafisklaget adds in an additional 200,000 kr each year for other marketing activities for whale meat.

The *Reklameutvalget* runs a website geared solely toward the promotion of whale meat, and offers numerous recipe suggestions (see www.hvalbiff.no). In addition, in recent summers, the programme has hired two people to take whale meat “on the road” in the so-called whale-mobile. The tour ran through some 40 plus towns and cities in Norway offering free samples of whale meat and recipe ideas.

Arktisk Meny, a project designed to promote “increasing knowledge and awareness” about local and traditional ingredients has also attempted to encourage a market for whale meat; Arktisk Meny covers all of northern Norway and Svalbard. The project is funded by the North Norwegian Association of Travel Companies and the Regional Council, or *Landsdelsutvalget*, of North Norway. Some 30 businesses, restaurants and hotels, participate and are charged membership fees.

A group of master chefs from northern Norway published a cookbook of whale meat recipes in 2007, which includes such meals as red wine marinated whale beef, and whale steaks with avocado salsa. The book was partially funded by the whaling industry.



the “Whalemobile”, summer 2008

Exports of whale meat

When the IWC ban on commercial whaling went into effect in 1986, Norway originally agreed to halt trade in whale products, despite the fact that it maintains a reservation to the Appendix 1 listing of whales at CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora). According to a report by the Norwegian Seafood Export Council, the inability of Norwegian whaling companies to export whale products to Japan cost the companies losses of up to about 9.8 million Norwegian kroner, or US\$1.12 million, between 1993 (when Norway resumed commercial catches) and 2001.

Prior to the lifting of the trade ban, there were attempts to export whale to Iceland. In 1998, Icelandic businessman Julius Jonsson tried to import whale blubber from Norway; Jonsson sought to buy the blubber from the Bastesen import company. The government eventually turned down the request to export the 100 tonnes of blubber.

It was in 2001 that the government decided to resume exports of meat and blubber to Japan, despite continued IWC and CITES bans. By the time the Norwegian government rescinded the ban on exports, it was being reported in the press that as much as 600 tonnes of whale blubber were being stored in freezers in northern Norway. Of this, some 400 tonnes alone were being maintained in freezers owned by the Ellingsen company of Skrova. Although exports of blubber were anticipated, the transaction stalled after tests confirmed elevated levels of toxins such as dioxin and PCBs.

By March of 2001, the Norwegian Food Safety Organization *Mattilsynet* began to caution about the need for limited consumption of whale blubber, and eventually recommended that pregnant and nursing women avoid blubber altogether. In 2002, Norway resumed exports of whale meat and blubber to Iceland, although in limited quantities. The trade, between the Norwegian whaling company Myklebust Trading AS and Icelandic importer Jon Gunnarsson, was limited.

In the end, two shipments of Norwegian meat and blubber –in total 25 tonnes – were exported in July and October of 2002. Again, concerns over toxin levels in the Norwegian products were raised, and exports to Iceland have not resumed. In March of 2003, the Faroe Islands began importing minke whale meat from Norway. Reports regarding the exports indicated that two shipments, totaling 32 tonnes, were sent.

Exports represent the only viable means of making large profits from meat and blubber for the Norwegian whaling industry. Blubber in particular has been a large and costly problem for the whaling industry. In 2002, the Norwegian government spent 4 million kroner to destroy 700 tons of blubber lying in freezer storage; it eventually came to light that much of the blubber had been used for pet food.

2008 saw the resumption of trade in whale meat, with Norway exporting a little more than 5 tons of minke meat to Japan. Jan Olavsén and Ole Mindor Myklebust exported the meat in a shipment with Icelandic whale

meat from the 2006 fin whale hunt by Icelandic whaling mogul Kristján Loftsson. The three companies collaborated on the whale meat shipment with Kyodo Senpaku, the same company behind the Japanese minke whale hunt in the southern ocean whale sanctuary. However, the Norwegian meat was held in customs pending permission by Japanese authorities.

In January of 2009, 4320 kilos of whale meat were confiscated by *Mattilsynet*, the national food safety organization in Norway; the meat that had been sitting in storage in the Vom og Hundemat pet food facility in Trøgstad, Norway. The stockpile was discovered when *Mattilsynet* received a request to grant a license for export of 720 kilos of whale meat for human consumption to the Faroe Islands. The whale meat originated from the Lofothval whale processing facility, and was from the 2007 and 2008 hunts.

Mattilsynet inspector Klaus Fotland, who visited the facility, said that there had been suspicions about the request from Lofothval to clear 720 kilos of the whale meat for sale as human food to the Faroe Islands, as the Vom og Hundemat company does not have clearance for the production of food for human consumption.

On February 6th 2009, the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry gave permission for a plan to allow the import of the 5.6 tons of minke whale meat from Norway referred to above; the decision marks the first time since 1988 that whale meat from Norway will be on sale in Japan.

Subsidies/support

The Norwegian government has given millions of kroner in recent years to support development of the whaling industry, including subsidies for fuel (via tax exemptions), storage and or destruction of whale blubber (for which there is no domestic market), and research and marketing support for whaling. Nearly 4 million kroner in costs were covered by the government, in order to destroy 700,000 kilos of unwanted whale blubber, and since

2004, the government has spent more than 3 million kroner on both a DNA registry for whale meat and the development of the "Blue Box", an electronic logbook system that Norway has used a reason to remove all inspectors from whaling vessels.

Two Norwegian state-run entities, Fiskerifond and Innovasjon Norge, have also given grants for developing the industry. Lofothval, a whaling company established in 2006, has received two grants of 100,000 kr each in 2007 and 2008 from Innovasjon Norge, a nationalised company that seeks to promote local industrial development..

Fiskerifond also gave a small grant to Myklebust Trading, a whale meat processing company, in 2007 for helping to develop marketing links for minke whale meat. Fiskerifond is an industry research funding mechanism answerable to the Norwegian Ministry of Fisheries.