



Norwegian whaling

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 2009. 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.

In 1982, when the IWC adopted the moratorium on commercial whaling, Norway was one of the few governments to take an objection 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; in 1993, it announced that it would resume commercial whaling under its objection.

The 2011 Norwegian whaling season officially opened on April 1st, with a quota of 1286 minke whales, the same as the previous year's quota. However, the final total kill for 2010, however, was 468 whales -- only 36% of the 1286 quota the whalers had been given. This was the lowest number of animals killed by Norway in ten years.

The 2011 quota also established a limit of 65 for the number of whales that could be killed in the area around Svalbard; however, the whalers reached that quota early in the season, and on the 17th of June, Fisheries and Coastal Affairs Lisbeth Berg-Hansen announced that the 65 limit would be lifted, and that whalers could hunt as many whales as they can in the Svalbard area, up to a limit of 260 animals which is what remains for the area quota for the period 2011 - 2014.

Whale meat sales

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

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and buyers a number of services directly related to trading, sales and settlements. Not all whalers opt in to the Råfisklaget's brokerage system; some larger whaling companies with their own vessels sell whale meat themselves, and the Råfisklaget handles about 80% of all the minke whale meat landed in Norway. Domestic sales of whale meat have continued to flag, and the largest potential export market, Japan, remains for the most part closed to Norwegian products.

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. As of 2011, Myklebust is selling 5kg packages of whale beef for 550 kroner. In restaurants, whale is often available, especially in the north. Whale meat appetizers such as carpaccio can run 150 kr, while entrees such as marinated whale beef and whale beef with game sauce go for around 275 kroner.

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.

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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 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 to run a PR campaign to encourage Norwegian consumers to buy whale meat. The project designed 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. By summer of 2009, however, it was decided that the whale-only approach was not working, and the whale mobile became the “Whale and Salmon”- mobile.



Trade in whale products

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.

In 2001, the Norwegian 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 reported in the press that as much as 600 tonnes of whale blubber were being stored in freezers in northern Norway. Although exports of blubber were eagerly anticipated by whalers, 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 the need for limited consumption of whale blubber, and by 2003 the group recommended that pregnant and nursing women avoid whale meat and blubber and altogether. These health warnings were re-issued in May of 2009.

Exports currently 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.

Icelandic nationals imported eight tonnes of minke whale meat and blubber from a Norwegian whaling company owned by Ole Mindor Myklebust in July 2002, and 17 more tonnes in October of 2002. The frozen Norwegian whale meat initially sold well, as it was going for a low price of 993 Icelandic kronur per kilo, below the cost of beef.

However, in 2003 it was discovered that the Norwegian whale meat contained much higher levels of mercury than the minkes taken in Iceland's 'scientific' hunt. As a result of this research into toxin levels in whale meat (both Icelandic and Norwegian), the Icelandic Surgeon General's office issued a warning to pregnant and nursing mothers to restrict their intake of whale meat due to concerns over high levels of mercury. A

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recommendation by the Norwegian Food Safety Authority also recommends that pregnant and nursing women avoid whale meat and blubber altogether.

Although a shipment of 5 tons of whale meat was exported to Japan in 2008, and cleared for sale in February of 2009, the meat was not sold due to bacterial contamination and high lactic acid levels.

In January of 2009, 4.320 tonnes of whale meat were confiscated by *Mattilsynet*; the meat 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.

Norway has also imported several small shipments of whale oil from Iceland in recent years.

Subsidies/support

In 2009, WDCS, in conjunction with WWF commissioned an independent study of the economics of the Norwegian whaling industry, which has received millions of dollars in subsidies from the government in recent years to support development of the whaling industry. The government has offered 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. The report concluded that:

Norway spent US\$10.5 million covering the costs of an inspection programme from 1993 until 2006, when it was scrapped due to the losses it was causing the country's whalers. The government has spent more than US\$4.9 million since 1992 on public information, public relations, and lobbying campaigns to garner support for its whaling and seal hunting industries. Government subsidies for the whaling industry have equalled almost half of the gross value of all whale meat landings made through the Rafisklaget, the Norwegian Fishermen's Sales Organisation.

Two Norwegian state-run entities, Fiskerifond and Innovasjon Norge, have 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, "to develop marketing links for minke whale meat". Fiskerifond is an industry research funding mechanism answerable to the Norwegian Ministry of Fisheries.

Norwegian whaling in crisis?

In April 2010, representatives of the Norwegian fishing industry called on the Fisheries Minister to raise subsidies to the whaling industry there, as they continue to have difficulties selling whale meat. According to press reports, however, the Minister was less than receptive to the idea, saying that it is up to the whalers and whale meat buyers to develop their own marketing scheme for whale meat. The head of the Nordland County Fishermen's Association, Steiner Jonassen, said that he fears that the whaling industry "will slowly, but surely die out" if increased sales are not promoted both through marketing and export.

Although two more boats have requested whaling licenses in 2011 than in 2010, according to the Norwegian news service NRK, the whaling industry is in "total" crisis. The head of the Norwegian Minke Whalers Association, Bjørn Hugo Bendiksen is calling on the government for help with marketing whale meat to supermarkets. Bendiksen is quoted as saying that whale meat sales and marketing problems are tough, and traditional whale meat buyers agree. Aage Eriksen, a fish buyer from Vågan who has bought whale meat for many years said in April of 2011 that "Every year the Board discusses whether we should buy whale meat. The reason we have discussed this is that we have trouble getting the meat onto supermarket shelves."

What is WDCS doing?

WDCS has been actively campaigning against Norwegian whaling and trade in whale meat for years, including the following:

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- Funding investigations, conducting unique opposition research into the whaling industry, and monitoring Norwegian press and government websites on a daily basis.
- Commissioning an [economic analysis](#) of Norway's whaling industry
- Undertaking an [analysis](#) of the proposal to resume commercial whaling
- Investigating Norway's use of and plans for whale products for international markets
- Sending an expert team to all meetings of the International Whaling Commission and CITES where our most intense and visible effort goes into deploying our scientific, legal and other technical skills to counter Norwegian proposals.
- Building relationships with governments so that they believe the intelligence we provide is correct and trust our advice.
- Providing technical support to like-minded governments seeking specialist legal or scientific input.
- Leading and participating in international coalitions of conservation and animal welfare groups so that our collective resources and effort are maximized.
- Our research and advocacy contribute to discussions and initiatives on benign research techniques.
- Publishing reports to inform the world community as to the counter the propaganda of Norwegian whaling interests, and on animal welfare concerns in the Norwegian hunt.

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