

Ouachita Baptist University

Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita

Honors Theses

Carl Goodson Honors Program

2009

Whaling and the Antarctic

Anna Tohlen

Ouachita Baptist University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors_theses



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Tohlen, Anna, "Whaling and the Antarctic" (2009). *Honors Theses*. 69.

https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors_theses/69

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Carl Goodson Honors Program at Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. For more information, please contact mortensona@obu.edu.

SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL

This Honors thesis entitled

“Whaling and the Antarctic”

written by

Anna Tohlen

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for completion of the Carl Goodson Honors Program meets the criteria for acceptance and has been approved by the undersigned readers.

(Name) thesis director

(Name) second reader

(Name) third reader

honors program director

April 22, 2009

Whaling and the Antarctic

Historical evidence shows that whale hunting by humans has been occurring for millennia. We are still finding evidence of early whaling cultures. In May 2007, a group of Alaskan Eskimos were butchering a 50-ton bowhead whale they had caught, when they found the barb of a 19th century whaling harpoon wedged in its bones (Dolin, 2007). Archaeological evidence for whaling goes as far back as 3000 BC (Ward, 2001). Whaling was very primitive and limited to smaller and slower whale species. In the 1620s, early American colonists began learning how to butcher whale carcasses that had washed ashore or beached themselves on the New England coast (Barcott, 2007). The growing demand for products obtained from whales led to the development of "shore-whaling" in the 1650s. A village lookout would signal a small group of men when a whale was close to shore. The men would climb into a small boat and paddle out to the whale. They would then throw a harpoon tied to their boat into the whale's body. The idea was to let the whale drag them until it tired, when the fatal kill would be made with a long knife. After half a century of selectively hunting the whale populations in the shallow waters near the coastline, a depletion of nearby whales pushed for the development of larger whaling ships that could withstand longer journeys and bigger prey (Barcott, 2007). The two primary products Americans desired from whales were oil, made from boiling whale blubber, and baleen (Dolin, 2007). Whale baleen was used in women's fashion, such as hoop

skirts and corset stays. The discovery of petroleum in Pennsylvania in 1848 caused a dramatic drop in the demand for whale oil (Dolin, 2007). The whaling industry was kept alive solely by the need for corset stays. A corset-less Parisian fashion line in 1907 put an end to the American whaling industry (Barcott, 2007). Whalers elsewhere saw a dramatic change in their fishing methods with the invention of a Norwegian steam-powered exploding harpoon in 1868 (Ward, 2001). Options for whaling species could now be expanded to include larger, more powerful game. Primary species sought by the whaling industry was heavily influenced by the technology available to whalers (Ward, 2001). Initially, the Humpback whale was over-hunted due to its slow speed and close proximity to shorelines. As whaling ships became faster and whaling trips could last longer, focus was shifted to the Blue whale, the most sought-after whale species for whaling ships. But, when the Blue whale population began to decline and chances of finding one while on a whaling expedition decreased, whalers began taking Fin, and then Sei, whales. In the 1970s, an international agreement banning the killing of Fin and Sei whales was passed, leading the whaling industry to hunt Minke whales. Whaling in Antarctica really began in 1904, when the first of several whale processing stations was established in Grytviken, South Georgia (Ward, 2001). Factory ships were used as early as 1925 (Ward, 2001). The larger vessels allowed processing of the whale carcass to occur on board the ship, eliminating the need for on shore whaling stations. And, because all catching and processing was done at sea, whaling vessels could avoid national whaling regulations.

Many efforts are being made today to help conserve current whale populations and rebuild those stocks that have been depleted by a history of whaling. Documentation providing for an International Whaling Commission (IWC) was signed in Washington DC on December 2, 1946 (IWC, 2008). Although some pro-whaling countries shed negative light on the IWC, the purpose of the commission is not to stop whaling or keep whales from being hunted for commercial purposes. The purpose of the IWC is to conserve current whale stock to allow for proper future development of the whaling industry. To accomplish this goal, the IWC helps to protect certain whale species, establish whale sanctuaries, create limits and regulations for the size and number of whale individuals caught, set seasons and areas for whaling, and prohibit killing of mothers with suckling calves. The IWC is very involved in funding and performing research on whales and whaling. The IWC emphasizes humane whaling and research capture techniques. The IWC's first whale sanctuary included the ocean below 40°S and between 70°W and 160°W (IWC, 2008). This particular area was selected because it had not been previously used for whaling, so the sanctuary was put into place to continue protecting the whale species there. It was established in 1938, and maintained until 1955 when the whaling ban was relaxed for three years to relieve pressure put on whale species elsewhere. In 1972 the first non-IWC whale sanctuary was created (IFAW, 2008). The sanctuary, Laguna Ojo de Liebre, is located in the Baja California Sur region of Mexico's west coast. The next IWC sanctuary to be established was the Indian Ocean Sanctuary (IWC, 2008). The region of the Indian Ocean extending down

to the 55°S latitude was declared a whale sanctuary by the IWC in 1979. The sanctuary was meant to last for 10 years, but that deadline has been extended twice, leaving the Indian Ocean Sanctuary still in place. The Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources was founded in 1982 as part of the Antarctic Treaty (CCAMLR, n.d.). It was created to fulfill the need for a convention with representatives from all countries in the Antarctic Treaty System, as stated in Article IX of the Antarctic Treaty. The Convention then created the Commission on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) to conserve marine life in the Southern Ocean. The Convention did not believe the CCAMLR should include seal or whale species, and left protection of seals and whales to their respective individual commissions, such as the IWC. The IWC initiated a moratorium in 1986 to give the thirteen whale species of the southern ocean a chance to recover their population numbers (ENS, 2007). The moratorium prohibits hunting of all whaling stock, but there is a loophole allowing for capture of whales for scientific research. The IWC's largest whale sanctuary was created in 1994 at the 46th annual IWC meeting (IWC, 2008). The Southern Ocean Sanctuary contains all of the waters surround the Antarctic continent. The northern boundary extends up to the 60°S latitude in the South Pacific, the 55°S latitude where it meets the Indian Ocean Sanctuary, and the 40°S latitude around the rest of the globe. By the late 1900s, there were at least 30 whale protection areas around the world (IFAW, 2008). In 2002, the IWC created a Working Group that would review existing whale sanctuaries and deal with proposals for new sanctuaries (IWC, 2008).

The future of commercial whaling is currently under discussion. Japan, along with other pro-whaling members of the IWC such as Norway and Iceland, is currently petitioning the IWC sanctuaries and 1986 commercial whaling ban (Gardiner, 2001). Some of the poorer nations in the IWC have aligned with Japan in pro-whaling issues. It has been suggested that Japan bought these countries' votes. For now, Japan is using the loophole created in the IWC moratorium for scientific research to continue their whaling practices (ENS, 2007). Japanese whaling ships have recently been fishing in the Australian sanctuary and claiming the captures for scientific research. Although the Australian government has allowed these whaling practices to continue in the past, the new Environment Minister Peter Garrett and Foreign Minister Stephen Smith have decided to crack down on the Japanese whalers (ENS, 2007). While they won't be enforcing their whaling ban laws on the Japanese whaling ships just yet, the Australian government will begin conducting air surveillance of the vessels to collect evidence that will hopefully help close the research loophole in the IWC whaling ban. Japan has proposed an alternative to the IWC whaling ban (BNET, 2001). This "revised management scheme" involves having an international monitor on board of each whaling ship and is favored by whaling countries. Adopting this alternative would pose two problems to the IWC: How much power should be given to the monitor? And who should fund the international monitor program? Whaling countries think that the power to enforce whaling regulations should be invested in the country where the whaling vessel is registered, but the IWC should fund the program. Anti-whaling nations are in favor of giving more

authority to the IWC representative on board the whaling ships and having the whaling nations fund the program. The quickest way to set aside more oceans as whale protection areas is for countries to exercise their rights over the exclusive economic zones (EEZ) surrounding their nations (IFAW, 2008). EEZ consists of the area within 200 nautical miles from a nation's coastline and were established under the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*, giving national sovereignty over marine resources lying within coastal waters. Thus, countries can declare the water surrounding their coastlines whale or marine sanctuaries. The strongest use of EEZs has been in the Pacific Islands (IFAW, 2008). The Pacific Island whale sanctuaries cover 28 million square kilometers and act complimentary to the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary. But Pacific Islanders have been pushing for an expansion of the IWC Southern Ocean Sanctuary into the South Pacific (ENS, 2003). Pacific Islanders have brought the proposal for a South Pacific Whale Sanctuary before the IWC three times and have yet to receive the three-quarters vote needed to approve the sanctuary.

References

- Australia Wants Japanese Whalers Out of Whale Sanctuary (2007, December). *Environment News Service*. Retrieved from <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/dec2007/2007-12-20-01.asp>
- Barcott, Bruce (2007, July). In the Shadow of Moby-Dick [Electronic version]. *The New York Times*.
- Commission information (2008). Retrieved from *International Whaling Commission, Inc.* Web site, <http://www.iwcoffice.org/commission/iwcmmain.htm>
- Dolin, Eric Jay (2007, July). A glimpse into whaling history [Electronic version]. *The Boston Globe*.
- Gardiner, Beth (2001, July). Japan, allies defeat plan for whale sanctuaries. *Seattlepi.com*. Retrieved from http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/national/32552_whaling25.shtml
- General Introduction (n.d.). Retrieved from *Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources* Web site, <http://www.ccamlr.org/>
- Kyodo News International (2001, July). IWC nixes south Pacific, Atlantic whale sanctuaries. *BNET Business Network*. Retrieved from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0XPQ/is_/ai_77291652
- National and Regional Whale Sanctuaries* (2008). Retrieved from *IFAW* Web Site, http://www.ifaw.org/ifaw_france/join_campaigns/protecting_whales_around_the_world/protecting_whales_and_their_habitats/sanctuaries_for_whales_a_global_approach/shortcut_of_national_and_regional_whale_sanctuaries.php
- Pacific Island Nations Honored for Whale Sanctuaries (2003, August). *Environment News Service*. Retrieved from <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/aug2003/2003-08-13-04.asp>
- Ward, Paul (2001). Whaling in Antarctica. *Cool Antarctica*. Retrieved from <http://www.coolantarctica.com/Antarctica%20fact%20file/wildlife/whales/whaling1.htm>
- Whale sanctuaries* (2008). Retrieved from *International Whaling Commission, Inc.* Web site, <http://www.iwcoffice.org/conservation/sanctuaries.htm>