

NORWEGIAN MINKE WHALING 2018, 2019, 2020 AND 2021

By the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries, Norway

In Norway, only minke whales are hunted. The hunt is conducted from small (50 feet) or medium sized (60-120 feet) fishing boats that are rigged for whaling in the spring and summer season. After it is dead, the whale is lifted on board and processed. The meat and other products are brought to processing plants in land either in fresh state or after being stored in ice in the hold.

Norwegian minke whaling in 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021

In 2018, 454 whales were taken by 11 vessels. Two whales (0.4%) were reported lost. In 2019, 429 whales were taken by 12 vessels. Two whales (0.5%) were reported lost. In 2020, 503 whales were taken by 13 vessels. Two whales (0.4%) were reported lost. In 2021, 577 whales were taken by 14 vessels. Nine whales (1.6%) were reported lost. At-sea monitoring of the catch was carried out using the Norwegian Electronic Trip Recorder System (Blue Box). In addition, periodic checks were carried out by inspectors from the Directorate of Fisheries.

Weapons and monitoring of the hunt

The weapons are 50 mm and 60 mm harpoon guns. The harpoon is equipped with a penthrite grenade (Whale grenade-99) developed in Norway in 1997-1999 (IWC/55/WK17, IWC/58/WKM&AWI 25). The grenade is loaded with 30 g pressed penthrite as explosive. The back-up weapon is a rifle of calibre .375 or .458, using full metal jacket, round-nosed bullets (IWC/55/WK15, IWC/55/WK17).

The gunners are required to pass obligatory shooting tests with harpoon gun and back-up rifle prior to each season. The boats are controlled and approved for hunting by inspectors from the Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries and the Norwegian Food Safety Authority. The Norwegian Electronic Trip Recorder (Blue Box) (IWC/57/RMS/8) is used for at-sea monitoring of the hunt. In some seasons observers under the NAMMCO International Observation Scheme are present on board. The latest NAMMCO observation was conducted during the 2016 season.

Research and developments on whale killing methods in Norway

Research on improved hunting and killing methods for whales was conducted in Norway from 1981 to 2007 (IWC/55/WK/17, IWC/58/WKM&AWI 25). Detailed data on the performance of the hunting methods have been collected for scientific purposes for more than 5500 hunted minke whales. From 1992 to 2007 twenty-seven extensive reports and scientific publications were presented to and discussed in five workshops organized by the IWC. From 2008 on, similar data and reports are presented to and discussed in the NAMMCO Committee of Hunting Methods.

TTD data collected in 2000-2002 using Whale grenade-99 showed that at least 80% of the whales were rendered instantly irreversibly unconscious or dead (IWC/58/WKM&AWI 25). The recorded average TTD was about 2 minutes using the criteria adopted by the IWC (IWC/33/15), which will include periods when animals have been unconscious or already dead (IWC/47/18, IWC/51/12, IWC/55/WK14, IWC/55/WK16, IWC/58/WKM&AWI 20, IWC/58/WKM&AWI 21). A few whales (< 0.5%) needed a second harpoon shot. In comparison, the percentage of animals recorded dead quickly (instant or within 1 minute) using cold harpoon (1981-83) was 17% with an average TTD over 11 minutes. 17 per cent had to be re-shot with harpoon (IWC/TC36/HK1).

A survey covering all hunting vessels during the 2011 and 2012 hunting seasons, TTD data were collected for 271 minke whales. Instantaneous death was recorded for 222 whales (82 %) with an average TTD of 1 min. The median TTD for the 49 whales not registered instantly dead was 6 min. One whale that had only been wounded was re-shot and died after 20-25 minutes (NAMMCO Expert Group Meeting to Assess TTD data Large Whales 4 – 6 November 2015, Copenhagen, Denmark. Document 8 – Norwegian Minke Whale Hunt 2011 and 2012, <https://nammco.no/expert-groups/>).

Other information on improvements of whaling operations

The Norwegian research has resulted in adoption of improved weaponry, methods, and regulations for the hunting of whales in several countries. Following the recommendations of the "IWC Action Plan", Dr EO Øen of Norway has worked co-operatively with hunters, scientists, authorities, and whale hunters' organisations in NAMMCO member and other countries (Canada, Japan, Russia, USA) to teach and train hunters, inspectors, and other personnel to transfer knowledge, developments and technology derived from the Norwegian research in order to improve methods and techniques used for the hunting of whales. In co-operation with the NAMMCO Committee on Hunting Methods and Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission (AEWC) he has helped in developing and/or re-editing instruction manuals for the maintenance and use of weaponry and equipment used for whaling in NAMMCO member countries and Alaska.