



IWC68 Briefing for Commissioners

ICELAND'S 2022 COMMERCIAL FIN WHALING SEASON

Summary

- This briefing provides an overview of welfare problems independently documented during Iceland's 2022 fin whaling season, including inaccurate firing of harpoons, malfunctioning of equipment (undetonated penthrite grenades) and the use of multiple harpoon shots to kill whales.
- Iceland's 2022 fin whaling season began on June 22nd and ended on September 29th, with a total of 148 whales taken. This year's hunts were the first by Iceland for four years.
- The following welfare concerns were documented by a German NGO, Hard To Port e.V. which monitored whaling vessels returning to the whaling station in Hvalfjörður between June 24th and August 1st, 2022. ¹ The elevated vantage point above the whaling station allowed for the recording of landings, as well as the flensing, butchering and rendering of the whales.



June 26th

A male fin whale landed by catcher ship Hvalur 8 had been struck by three harpoons. One was visible above the right pectoral fin and two more were embedded in the upper body of the whale.



July 4th

A female fin whale landed by catcher ship Hvalur 9 had been struck by two harpoons, one unexploded. The undetonated harpoon was clearly visible in the whale's side with the penthrite grenade still attached.



July 19th

A female fin whale landed by catcher ship Hvalur 9 had been struck by two harpoons. One harpoon visibly penetrated the whale's head, behind the eye but did not explode. The other penetrated its back.



July 21st

A pregnant female fin whale landed by catcher ship Hvalur 8 had been struck by two harpoons, one unexploded. The harpoon with the unexploded grenade penetrated the right pectoral fin; the other had struck the belly. An approximately 1m long foetus was removed by Hvalur hf. employees.



August 1st

A male fin whale landed by catcher ship Hvalur 8 had been struck by four harpoons, two unexploded. Three were visible at the time of the landing whilst the fourth was exposed during the butchering process. Two harpoons still had the undetonated penthrite grenade attached.

Hunting Methodology

Iceland hunts fin whales by firing Whale Grenade-99s modified with 100g of pressed penthrite from 90mm Kongsberg harpoon cannons. The location of the harpoon strike is important since a strike outside of the head/upper thoracic region is less likely to induce immediate insensibility. Dr. Egil Ole Øen (2015) has noted that [whales shot from behind have a higher instantaneous death rate](#), and that fin whales optimally should be shot from the side (45°-135° relative to the whale's length axis). If the grenade tip on the end of the harpoon fails to explode, then [the whale is unlikely to die instantly and a secondary killing method must be deployed](#). In Iceland, this is a second harpoon grenade. According to Dr. Øen (2015), [reloading the harpoon takes Icelandic whalers about eight minutes](#).²

Based on Dr Øen's calculation, the male fin whale killed on August 1st that required 4 harpoons could have suffered for as many as 24 minutes before death.

These incidents may represent violations of Icelandic law:

1. Iceland's Animal Welfare Act (2013) Articles 21 and 27³ require that: "Animals must be killed swiftly and painlessly, and where possible without other animals becoming aware of the killing. Causing the animals to experience unnecessary pain or fear shall be avoided." "Hunting must always be conducted in a manner that minimises the pain inflicted on the animals and the time needed to kill them. Hunters must do everything within their means to kill any animal which they have injured. When hunting, no method shall be used which inflicts unnecessary injury or pain on an animal."
2. Iceland's 2009 whaling regulation (amending whaling regulation no. 163 [1973]).⁴ This requires that, "When [fishing], equipment must be used that ensures that whales are killed immediately or that killing takes the shortest possible time and causes them the least amount of suffering."

A further consideration is the fact that assessing the accuracy of the shot and the exact time of the whale's death is [very difficult when a harpoon is being fired from a moving vessel at a moving target](#), with potentially challenging sea conditions.

Iceland's Minister of Food, Svandís Svavarsdóttir, reacted to the documented irregularities in the 2022 hunt, announcing on 7th July that she would propose an amendment to the regulation on Icelandic whaling, to require the captain of a whaling vessel to appoint a trained animal welfare officer who would be responsible for documenting the hunt by video from start to finish, to ensure it is properly conducted in welfare terms.

On August 9th, 2022, the Icelandic Food and Veterinary Authority (MAST) confirmed via e-mail to WDC that it was investigating the current whaling in Iceland "especially on grounds of animal welfare".⁵

On August 10th, 2022, Minister Svavarsdóttir issued a new regulation⁶ on the control of whaling. The regulation tasks MAST with regular monitoring of whaling vessels to ensure compliance with the Icelandic Law on Animal Welfare during whaling. Inspectors are required to record, including through the use of video, all hunting methods and other actions related to animal welfare. Hunting inspectors will be on board during all whaling trips and all data must be submitted to a supervising veterinarian at the end of each inspection. MAST has been authorised to entrust the Icelandic Fisheries Agency (Fiskistofa), with the collection of the data mandated by the new regulation.

Given these developments during the 2022 whaling season, we [urge Contracting Governments to do the following](#) at the meeting of the Whale Killing Methods and Welfare Issues Working Group at IWC68:

1. Ask Iceland to report killing methods, times to death, struck and lost whales, number of strikes, number of unexploded harpoons and body lengths for all whales killed in Iceland since 2006 for which data has not already been submitted.
2. Request that Iceland collects data on the angle of each shot fired.
3. Ask the Icelandic Government to conduct a thorough analysis and publication of all data and footage obtained during the official monitoring of the 2022 whaling season.
4. Urge Iceland to investigate and address the reasons for so many harpoon grenades failing to detonate this season; ask whether the hydrophone and accelerometer system that Hvalur hf. reportedly installed on its catcher boats was successful in determining whether a harpoon grenade exploded.⁷
5. Given the elapse of four years since whaling was last conducted in Iceland, ask if a training course was held for returning or new crew members.

We also ask Commissioners to urge Iceland to report to the Infractions Sub-committee all new legislation and regulations related to whales and whaling, as required by Schedule Paragraph 31.

References

1. Arne Feuerhahn, Hard To Port e.V.
2. Killing efficiency in the Icelandic fin whale hunt 2014 Report to the Directorate of Fisheries in Iceland, February 19, 2015 By Dr. Egil Ole Øen Wildlife Management Service-Sweden.
https://www.fiskistofa.is/media/utgefid_efni/Oen2015_finwhale_TTDreport_final.pdf
3. <https://www.government.is/lisalib/getfile.aspx?itemid=d1718344-68cf-11e8-9429-005056bc4d74>
4. Regulation amending Regulation no. 163, 30 May 1973, on whaling, with subsequent amendments (2009)
<https://www.reglugerd.is/reglugerdir/efrir-raduneytum/sjavarutvegsraduneyti/nr/15257>
5. Email to WDC, Whale and Dolphin Conservation, pers. comm.
6. REGLUGERÐ 917/2022 um eftirlit með velferð dýra við veiðar á hvölum The regulation seeks to ensure that “hunting causes the animals the least pain and that their killing takes the shortest possible time”.
<https://www.stjornarradid.is/default.aspx?pageid=e5cf150d-33a7-11e6-80c7-005056bc217f&newsid=48c37545-1986-11e6-9baf-005056bc4727&fbclid=IwAR3NrK-xU6Wh7oTJ-DwvPpMtaybPvTyCF-38NxClaGBJudjNXEqLdSsiaBs>
7. North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission. (2015). Report of the expert group meeting on assessing time to death data from the large whale hunts. p. 14 <http://nammco.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/report-of-expert-group-meeting-on-ttd-data-for-large-whales.pdf>