

CIRCULAR COMMUNICATION TO COMMISSIONERS  
AND CONTRACTING GOVERNMENTS  
IWC.CCG.767

**Call for information on whale killing methods and associated welfare issues**

Discussions on whale killing methods and associated welfare issues in the Commission have focused on data and information: (1) requested through Resolutions 1997-1, 1999-1, 2001-2 and 2004-3; (2) in relation to the Action Plan on Whale Killing Methods (which was last revised at IWC/55); and (3) submitted to the various workshops, the latest of these being held at IWC/58 last year. Copies of the Resolutions, the most recent Action Plan and recommendations from the last workshop held at IWC/58 in St. Kitts and Nevis in 2006 are attached as Annex 1.

The purpose of this Circular is to invite Contracting Governments to submit information in accordance with these Resolutions and Action Plan as appropriate.

The Resolutions, *inter alia*, encourage the reporting of:

- information on whales killed, such as: number of whales killed by each method; number and proportion of whales killed instantaneously; time to death for each animal not killed instantly; variance data on times to death (to the extent possible); number of whales targeted and missed; number of whales struck and lost; calibre of rifle where used and how many bullets used; methods used to determine unconsciousness/time of death;
- steps being taken to improve the humaneness of whaling operations.

The above are targeted at member countries involved in taking whales. However, certain operative paragraphs apply to all Contracting Governments in that:

- all Contracting Governments are encouraged to provide appropriate technical assistance to reduce time to unconsciousness and death in all whaling operations;
- all Contracting Governments are encouraged to provide relevant data from the killing of other large mammals.

With respect to the provision of information on whales killed, the Secretariat has developed a Summary Reporting Form that you may wish to use (see Annex 2). Please note that completion of the form is not compulsory and it is not intended to replace the submission of detailed documents where appropriate.

**I would be grateful if data and information could be provided to the Secretariat by 11 May 2009** so that it can be circulated in advance of the meeting of the Working Group on Whale Killing Methods and Associated Welfare Issues that is scheduled to take place in the afternoon of Tuesday 16 June.

Dr. Nicky Grandy  
Secretary to the Commission

**Annex 1**  
**Resolutions, Action Plan on Whale Killing Methods and Associated Welfare Issues and**  
**Recommendations from the IWC/58 Workshop**

**IWC Resolution 1997-1**  
**Resolution on improving the humaneness of Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling**

The International Whaling Commission:

RECOGNISING the need to hunt whales by aboriginal people with a continuing traditional dependence on whaling to meet their nutritional, subsistence and cultural needs;

AWARE of the need to ensure that aboriginal subsistence whaling causes the least possible pain and distress to hunted whales;

NOW, THEREFORE, the Commission:

WELCOMES the steps taken so far by the aboriginal subsistence whalers of the United States of America, the Russian Federation and Greenland to improve the humaneness of whaling techniques in aboriginal subsistence hunts;

URGES them to do everything possible to reduce still further any unavoidable suffering caused to whales in such hunts;

REQUESTS the United States of America, the Russian Federation and Denmark to continue to inform the Commission on an annual basis of progress made in this matter, and to provide other information concerning the taking of whales under aboriginal subsistence quotas;

REQUESTS all Contracting Parties to provide appropriate technical assistance to improve the humaneness of aboriginal subsistence whaling;

AGREES to consider this issue at annual meetings of the Humane Killing Working Group;

REQUESTS the next Workshop on Whale Killing Methods to review the data received by the Commission on this matter.

## **IWC Resolution 1999-1**

### **Resolution Arising From The Workshop On Whale Killing Methods**

NOTING that the terms of reference for the 1999 IWC Workshop on Whale Killing Methods included the consideration of all methods of killing currently in use in whaling or known to be in development, and specified that a comparative analysis of the methods be undertaken with a view to improving whale killing techniques and minimising times to irreversible insensibility and death;

RECALLING IWC Resolution 1997-1 which urged aboriginal subsistence whalers to do everything possible to reduce still further any avoidable suffering caused to whales in such hunts;

RECOGNISING the efforts made by some countries to provide information on research and improvements in hunting methods;

WHEREAS the Workshop submitted its report, IWC/51/12, to the Commission for consideration;

Now THEREFORE the Commission

1. COMMENDS the Report of the Workshop and accepts the 11 point Action Plan (which appears as Appendix 1 of the Chairman's Report of the 51<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting) as the basis for advice to members of the IWC.

2. ENCOURAGES where possible the submission to the annual meetings of the Working Group on Whale Killing Methods and Associated Welfare Issues, and future Workshops of relevant information such as:

- number of whales killed by each method;
- number and proportion of total whales killed instantaneously;
- time to death for each animal not killed instantly;
- number of whales targeted and missed;
- number of whales struck and lost;
- calibre of rifle where used and how many bullets used;
- methods used to determine unconsciousness/time of death.

3. ENCOURAGES the development of more accurate indicators for determining time to death other than cessation of movement.

4. RECOGNISES the difficulty in some aboriginal subsistence hunts of obtaining time to death information; and notes that, where it can be assessed, the lack of information regarding time to death on aboriginal subsistence hunts prohibits an assessment of any improvement in these hunts.

5. ENCOURAGES all Contracting Governments to provide appropriate technical assistance to reduce time to unconsciousness and death in all aboriginal subsistence whaling.

## **Resolution 2001-2**

### **Resolution on Whale Killing Methods**

RECOGNISING that the Working Group on Whale Killing Methods and Associated Welfare Issues (WGWKM&AWI) is established to review information and documentation available with a view to advise the Commission on whale killing methods and associated welfare issues;

NOTING that IWC/53/WKM&AWI9 as distributed by the Secretariat calls for a Summary of Activities related to the Action Plan on Whale Killing Methods (based on resolution 1999-1), and the UK Paper on Collection of Whale Killing Data (IWC/53/WKM&AWI5) submitted to WGWKM&AWI53;

RECALLING IWC resolution 1997-1 which urged aboriginal subsistence whalers to do everything possible to reduce still further any avoidable suffering caused to whales in such hunts;

NOTING the proposal that Contracting Governments should supply data on animal welfare issues to the IWC;

DISAPPOINTED at the lack of information presented to the WGWKM&AWI on the recent kills of sperm and Bryde's whales.

RECOGNISING that seasonal and weather variations can adversely impact times to death;

NOTING the inclusion of the recommendation for the development of better criteria for determining the onset of permanent insensibility in whales, using physiological and behavioural observations, correlated as far as possible with post mortem examinations, under the revised action plan on whale killing methods IWC51Ann rep. Appendix 1;

NOTING also that previous Workshops have considered relevant comparative data from killing of other large mammals.

NOW THEREFORE THE COMMISSION:

AGREES to convene in 2003 a Workshop on Whale Killing Methods;

ENCOURAGES all Contracting Governments to report to the Commission any technical developments within whale killing technologies and to submit, to the extent possible, relevant information, including variance data on times to death, to the meetings of the Working Group on Whale Killing Methods and Associated Welfare Issues, and future Workshops on Whale Killing Methods;

ALSO ENCOURAGES all Contracting Governments to provide relevant comparative data from killing of other large mammals;

ENCOURAGES all Contracting Governments to provide appropriate technical assistance to reduce time to unconsciousness and death in all whaling operations.

**Resolution 2004-3**  
**RESOLUTION ON WHALE KILLING ISSUES**

RECOGNISING THAT welfare considerations for cetaceans killed for food is of international concern;

NOTING THAT Article V.1.f of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling empowers the Commission to amend the Schedule “to adopt regulations with respect to the conservation and utilisation of whale resources by fixing ... types and specifications of gear and apparatus and appliances which may be used”, and that the Commission has exercised this welfare mandate through modification of the schedule and adopting 15 resolutions on welfare aspects of whaling which have established several technical fora for addressing welfare issues;

RECALLING THAT the IWC has defined “Humane Killing” as “Death brought about without pain, stress, or distress perceptible to the animal. That is the ideal. Any humane killing technique aims first to render an animal insensitive to pain as swiftly as technically possible. In practice this cannot be instantaneous in the scientific sense” (IWC/33/15 & IWC/51/12) and that, in order to determine whether these criteria are met, various data must be collected from whaling operations;

FURTHER RECOGNISING that the IWC criteria used to determine death or irreversible insensibility are inadequate; while also recognising that the IWC Working Group and Workshops on Whale Killing Methods are attempting to develop criteria to more adequately determine death or irreversible insensitivity both operationally and from post-mortem approaches;

NOTING THAT the efficiency of killing methods is influenced by many factors including the calibre of the weapon used, the nature of the ammunition, the target area of the whale, the angle of the shot, the proximity of the whale to the vessel, the accuracy of the gunner, prevailing weather conditions and sea state, including sea ice, and the size and species of the whale targeted;

NOTING FURTHER THAT data collection requirements are not being met in some hunts, while appreciating that efforts have been made by some member nations to provide available data;

RECALLING that Contracting Parties should make reasonable attempts to release alive, with the minimum harm possible, whales that have been incidentally captured (IWC Resolution 2001-4), but that the Commission has not considered the welfare implications of this practice nor the killing methods that might be employed if the whale cannot be released;

NOTING WITH CONCERN THAT the number of whales struck in some hunts can have significant welfare implications, while appreciating the efforts of certain member nations, especially Norway, to improve the humaneness of their hunts through weapons improvement programs and increased hunt efficiency;

NOW THEREFORE THE COMMISSION:

EXPRESSES CONCERN, in light of its mandate and long-standing commitment to address welfare issues, that current whaling methods do not guarantee death without pain, stress or distress; that data presently collected and submitted to the Commission are of insufficient quality or completeness for it to make a fully informed assessment of the welfare implications of all whaling operations; and that the criteria currently used to determine the onset of death or irreversible insensibility are inadequate;

REQUESTS THE SECRETARIAT TO update the data collection form for the reporting of data in order that contracting governments may report data for each whale taken, the killing method used and samples taken;

REQUESTS the IWC57 annual meeting to reconvene the Working Group on Whale Killing Methods and Associated Welfare issues, to examine methods for reducing struck and lost rates in whaling operations and to consider the welfare implications of methods used to kill whales caught in nets;

REQUESTS the Working Group on Whale Killing Methods and Associated Welfare Issues to advise the Commission on:

- establishing better criteria for determining the onset of irreversible insensibility and death;
- methods of improving the efficiency of whale killing methods and
- reducing times to death and other associated welfare issues.

## REVISED ACTION PLAN ON WHALE KILLING METHODS

(Workshop on Whale Killing Methods and Associated Welfare Issues, 7-9 June 2003, Berlin, Germany)

### **A. Equipment and Methods**

- (1) Encourage continued co-operation **among Contracting Governments** to refine the design of penthrite grenades as far as possible.
- (2) Continue improving accuracy of delivery of penthrite grenade harpoons, including assessment of refined sighting equipment suitable for rapid action under conditions encountered at sea. Support and encourage the development and implementation of programmes to provide training in the safe handling and effective use of killing devices including the penthrite grenade and in other aspects of the hunt.
- (3) Continue to review constraints on shooting distance and relative orientation of vessel and whale and encourage reducing times to death.
- (4) Continue to review effectiveness of secondary killing methods with a view to reducing times to death in whales and encourage the application of the most effective methods.

### **B. Indication of insensibility and death**

- (5) Develop better criteria for determining the onset of permanent insensibility in whales, using physiological and behavioural observations.

### **C. Assessment of cause of death in relation to observed time to death**

- (6) Where possible, examine the effects of trauma, and its consequences, caused by harpoons and other devices used to capture whales, and its relationship to the reactions of the captured whale. Develop standardised guidelines for recording major indications of death.

### **D. Collection and provision of information on time of death**

- (7) Encourage collaboration between technical and scientific experts with a view to suggesting evidence based guidelines for the collection and dissemination of information in relation to both primary and secondary killing methods in forms that allow the effectiveness of different methods to be compared. The data should be presented to the maximum extent possible with statistical analysis that allows independent appraisal and analysis.
- (8) Encourage collection and presentation of struck and lost rates and standardised **estimated** time to death records in all aboriginal subsistence catches of whales and undertake assessment of requirements for controls on the use of rifles to kill unsecured whales.
- (9) Encourage the incorporation of data collection and reduction of struck and lost rates in initiatives in Greenland relating to the beluga and narwhal hunts.

### **E. Assessment of physiological status of hunted animals**

- (10) Develop suggested guidelines for, and where possible implement collection of representative biological samples from whales in extremis with an aim to determining reliable indices of stress for animals killed in whaling operations.

### **F. Next steps**

The Workshop participants encourage the IWC to hold a further **scientific and technical workshop in 3-5 years** and to call for **further improvements in data collection, analysis and reporting** in order to evaluate progress made in improving whale killing methods. In the meantime, information should **continue to** be provided to the appropriate technical Working Group.

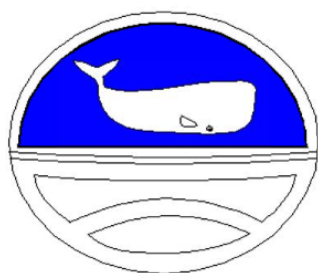
**Extract from Document IWC/58/Rep7:  
Report of the Workshop on Whale Killing Methods and Associated Welfare Issues**

*Workshop Recommendations*

The Chair reminded participants of the terms of reference and task for this item. He identified some key considerations and issues, particularly those of a practical nature, identified during the workshop. Proposals of recommendations were received from a number of countries (UK, Norway, Finland, Switzerland, Sweden and New Zealand). Following consideration and debate, the following recommendations were adopted by the Workshop:

1. To encourage continued efforts in training and dissemination of good practice around the world, for example in promotion of, and further investigation of, the use of heart shots from back up rifle where the head of the animal is under the water.
2. Recommend the best possible type and calibre weapon is used in aboriginal subsistence whaling and continue weapon technology improvement for use in aboriginal subsistence whaling with particular focus on calibre of weaponry. Encourage the development of the aboriginal subsistence whaling caucus to further the exchange of information and best practice.
3. Recommend continued efforts to improve accuracy of placement of primary and back-up shots, to continue improvements towards achieving instantaneous death.
4. Recommend continuing efforts to improve back up/secondary killing methods. Recommend that governments continue to support their scientists and vets in studying welfare aspects and monitoring, evaluating and improving welfare techniques, and to publish the data.
5. Member countries of the IWC exchange information on methods for dealing with entrapped, entangled and stranded cetaceans, drawing on the domestic protocols of member countries; and to review the methods used to euthanase cetaceans at sea when entangled in fishing gear or marine debris.
6. When using explosive devices, for welfare reasons whales should whenever possible be shot from the side at the thorax or neck and all animals should if possible be hauled in as fast as possible to control if the animal needs to be re-shot.
7. When using the rifle as back-up, the recommended target areas are the brain, upper neck and in emergency situations possibly the heart.
8. As a precaution, the hunters should be recommended to re-shoot as a routine any animals that move or in other ways show any signs of life.
9. Recognise the importance of hunter training for the improvement of hunters' safety, animal welfare and minimising struck and lost rate.
10. Recognise the importance of maintaining weapons and hunting gear.
11. Encourage in two years time when progress can be assessed, consideration of the holding of a further scientific and technical Workshop.

## Annex 2: Summary Reporting Form



### International Whaling Commission

The Red House, 135 Station Road  
Impington, Cambridge CB4 9NP, UK

Tel: +44 (0)1223 233971

Fax: +44 (0)1223 232876

E-mail: [Secretariat@iwcoffice.org](mailto:Secretariat@iwcoffice.org)

Web site: <http://www.iwcoffice.org>

## Summary of Activities Related to the Action Plan on Whale Killing Methods (based on Resolution 1999-1)

Please note that completion of this form is not compulsory but it will greatly aid the discussions at the forthcoming Working Group Meeting. The Secretariat would be grateful if you can complete this form as fully as possible, preferably electronically and return it to [Secretariat@iwcoffice.org](mailto:Secretariat@iwcoffice.org) by 11 May 2009.

Contracting Government	
Season	
Area	
Fishery type (e.g. commercial, aboriginal subsistence, scientific permit)	

Table 1. Summary of primary and secondary whale killing methods used (Note that the appropriate Method No. should be used throughout the form):

Method No.	Brief description of method (e.g. penthrite grenade, 'cold' grenade, rifle of stated calibre, etc). Put the most commonly used method first. Insert more rows if necessary.	Used as: (state whether primary killing method, secondary, or both)
1		
2		
3		

Summary of criteria used to indicate unconsciousness and death:

[Include brief description here]



**Table 2: Summary of information providers:**

Percentage of data provided by:	
▪ inspectors	
▪ scientists	
▪ hunters	
▪ other (please specify)	

**Table 3: Summary of hunt:**

Item	Species 1 <i>[insert name]</i>		Species 2 <i>[insert name]</i>		Species 3 <i>[insert name]</i>	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<b>Whale killing methods</b>						
▪ Total no. killed (all methods summed)						
▪ Total killed using Method 1 only						
▪ Total killed using Method 2 only						
▪ Total killed using Method 3 only						
▪ Total needing secondary harpoon or other secondary killing method						
▪ If bullets used						
○ minimum number						
○ maximum number						
○ median number						
<b>Time to unconsciousness/death (TTD)*</b>						
▪ Total for which information recorded						
▪ Total estimated TTD to be instant						
▪ Maximum estimated TTD						
▪ Mean time to TTD						
▪ Median Time to TTD						
<b>Other information</b>						
▪ Total targeted and missed						
▪ Total struck and lost						

**\*NB Resolution 1999-1 asks for TTD information for each whale not killed instantly. This can be provided via Table 4 below.**

**Other:** Any other relevant information e.g. with information on technical assistance given to other fisheries or with respect to new studies to (a) improve methods and TTD, (b) develop new criteria for TTD:

**Table 4: Reporting of data on individual whales killed**

<b>Whale:</b>	<b>Species</b>	<b>Killing method(s) used</b>	<b>Time to Death<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Samples taken</b>
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				
10.				
11.				
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17.				
18.				
19.				
20.				
21.				
Etc.				

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<sup>1</sup> Resolution 1999-1 encouraged reporting of time to death for each animal not killed instantly