

**Statement
by the *Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition (ASOC)*
to the meeting of the International Whaling Commission
in Jersey, Channel Islands, July 2011.**

Observer: Sidney J Holt

It is forty years since the collapse of what had been the world's biggest 'fishery' – that for the largest beasts ever to have inhabited this planet: the blue, fin and humpback whales that fed in the rich waters of the Southern Ocean. The shores of the Antarctic and sub-Antarctic islands are littered with the ruins of whaling stations and the hulks of whale catchers. The ruin of that vast resource has been described by some as 'harvesting'; it was not, it was 'mining' even though in later years it became labeled as 'sustainable use'.

Thousands of steam and motor vessels brought oil, other foodstuffs and commodities, and much wealth to the Northern Hemisphere, benefiting the main perpetrators of the slaughter – companies based in Norway, Japan, the USSR/ Russia and Britain, with a little help from a few other industrialised nations: Germany, Netherlands, USA, Argentina, Chile.

A few years later the residual industry was brought to a temporary end by the actions of the IWC in designating vast sanctuaries and adopting moratoria on baleen and sperm whaling. Those acts were to have been followed, eventually, by a 'comprehensive assessment of their effects', to be orchestrated by the IWC. That never happened; mere re-analyses of entirely inadequate, fragmentary existing data were the substitutes, given a similar name: 'Comprehensive assessments', stock by stock, species by species. Instead, much research and enormous political attention has been devoted to counting – with limited success – the smallest remaining baleen whale species, the minke, simply because that is what the remnants of the whaling industry want to 'mine'.

Although that species still exists in the hundreds of thousands it is a relatively tiny feature of the southern ocean ecosystem. Its total

biomass is no more than 5% of that of the bigger baleen whales of the hemisphere before their near extermination. And that's not even counting the sperm whales.

Scientific research on this mutilated ecosystem to monitor and understand its hoped-for recovery, through several International Decades of Cetacean Research and subsequent international programmes, has been even more miniscule in comparison with the effort that was put into the whale mining. Research efforts recently initiated by Australia, using new techniques, are a welcome extension of preceding efforts but are not yet on a scale that can really tell us what is happening biologically in the Southern Ocean. Meanwhile, wonderful photographs on the Internet show some of the beneficiaries of the end of the whale slaughter – recovering seals and penguins that were practically exterminated in an earlier era of visits by humans - reclining in and around the ruined whaling stations. They give us hope that one day the whales will be back, too, in their glory, but that might take a century.

The Government of Monaco is proposing to the United Nations that, as part of a revised implementation of the Law of the Sea, , practically all whales and dolphins, listed in the Law as Highly Migratory Species, be 'fully and permanently protected' at least when on the high seas beyond the limits of national jurisdictions. Most of the Southern Ocean is 'high seas' and likely to remain so, at least while the Antarctic Treaty remains in force. Furthermore most of the southern Indian Ocean region,, where the larger whales are protected by the IWC's Indian Ocean Sanctuary, is beyond national jurisdictions, as would be most of the South Atlantic if the proposal by Brazil, Argentina and others to designate that region as a whale sanctuary were to be adopted. Implementation of Monaco's proposal to the UN would offer further protection to all the other, mostly smaller, whales that the IWC has so far neglected. Perhaps it is worth mentioning that some of those 'smaller' species, such as the southern bottlenose whale, very numerous according to Japanese research, but not yet subject to 'mining' under the guise of 'sustainable use', are actually as big as the biggest terrestrial mammals.

In the light of this array of developments and propositions A SOC believes that the time has come to develop a serious long-term plan for both research on, and conservation of the Southern Hemisphere marine system as far as the cetaceans are concerned, including collaborative activities on the high seas and, under the supervision of the southern coastal states concerned, in the areas under national jurisdictions. Further, it would be appropriate for the IWC to take the lead in such a grand international enterprise, cooperating with CCAMLR, national research organizations and the relevant organs of the United Nations system such as FAO, IMO, Unesco/ IOC and the UN itself.

That would be costly, but not nearly so much as the profit reaped
from the destruction.

Let, at long last, the nettle be grasped,
the bullet bitten
and *carpe diem*.