

# Imposing our preferences on whaling cultures

Restrictions on environmental resource use and sustainability should be based on science, not emotion, writes **Jennifer Marohasy**

**F**ew issues illustrate how subjective beliefs about morality distorts environmental debate more than the issue of whaling.

Many environmentalists claim to be simply advocates for the sustainable use of resources; they claim that they are not in favour of outright banning any sort of resource use. But this is difficult to reconcile with their actions.

Deepak Lal has written about the West's obsession with promoting its 'habits of the heart' through the propaganda of non-government organisations, most of whom espouse environmental causes. As Lal explains in his 2006 book *Reviving the Invisible Hand*, the bread and butter of environment groups involves arousing the fear of 'Apocalypse Now' (an enduring superstition of mankind) along with the 'muddled cosmological beliefs of the West' about how one should live.

Lal notes that after the Second World War, a number of international organisations were created and they now impose western ideas of morality upon the rest of the world.

The International Whaling Commission (IWC) is such an organisation, established in 1948 at the initiative of the United States to establish a new world order in whaling. Initially, 15 governments were party to the IWC (at the time Japan was under occupation and without the right to join.) The Commission's objectives included safeguarding the great natural resources represented by whale stocks and providing for the 'orderly development of the whaling industry' recognising that whale stocks will increase if whaling is properly regulated.

But by the 1960s, an anti-whaling movement had emerged in the West and the IWC's focus started to change. In 1972, at the United Nations Human Environmental Conference held in Stockholm, the United States lobbied for a moratorium on commercial whaling; a moratorium that came into effect ten years later.

## The survival of whaling in Japan...

Japan initially took action to be exempt from the moratorium in accordance with Article V of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling.

Japan made the case that the moratorium infringed upon provisions within the Convention in particular that decisions of the IWC be based on scientific findings—at the time the scientific recommen-

dation was that the moratorium was unnecessary—and take into consideration the interests of consumers of whale product.

The United States threatened that unless Japan withdrew its objection it would revoke the fishing allocation for Japanese trawlers off the west coast of Alaska. Japan withdrew its objection, but the US nevertheless phased out its fishing allocation to Japan. But the Japanese are not going to give up a 5,000 year old tradition of eating whale meat, and particularly not when it was whale meat from the Antarctic that they believed saved them from starvation immediately following World War II. They have found loopholes in the Convention to keep whaling while the moratorium is in place.

In their 2003 book *Whales and the Japanese*, Masayuki Komatsu and Shingeko Misaki argue that the Japanese don't like others to dictate what 'our habits should be' and suggest that the anti-whaling lobby is practicing ethnic and cultural discrimination. At a summit of traditional Japanese whaling communities held in March 2002, it was affirmed that 'the basis of Japanese whaling tradition and culture, characterised by the total utilisation of the whales and a spirit of gratitude, should be maintained and perpetuated.'

The Japanese have a strong connection to the Shinto and Buddhist religions and believe that deep respect should be afforded animals that are killed so we may eat. This respect involves not wasting any part of the animal and the Japanese have made a virtue out of utilising every part of the whale. There is also a cemetery for whales in the Koganji Buddhist Temple in Nagato City where the foetuses of whales that 'did not live to swim in the sea' are buried and *kakochos* (books of the dead) dedicated to the whales that gave their lives for the well-being of humans. A service is held once a year in the temple to pray for the souls of the whales.

Not surprisingly the Japanese want an end to the moratorium on commercial whaling and the right to continue to harvest whales. They

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see the moratorium as reflecting Western arrogance and believe that they will prevail, simply because 'we are right.' That is not to say they want an unregulated system. It is recognised that populations of large whale species, in particular blue whales, were in decline by the 1960s because of mismanagement and that whaling was a legitimate conservation issue at that time. The Japanese also made reference to the wasteful habits of some other whaling nations, in particular hunting whales only for their oil.

### ... and the end of whaling in Australia

The campaign to stop whaling at Albany in Western Australia in the late 1970s was a seminal event. It immediately preceded the moratorium, culminated in the end of whaling in the English-speaking world, the formation of Greenpeace Australia, and the emergence of the Australian government as a leading advocate for the worldwide ban.

The campaign is documented in a new book, *The Last Whale*, by journalist Chris Pash. Pash provides an insight into the modus operandi of the activists and the place of whales in what some describe as the new religion of environmentalism.

Pash explains in the book that the campaign was not about stock depletion—there were lots of whales off the West Australian coast. Rather it was about protecting whales because they are 'special'. Pash writes that early in the campaign one activist, Richard Jones, a mail-order business proprietor, came to believe that the good fortune they experienced couldn't be considered accidental, that it was as if they were being communicated to by the whales, that there was intelligent design at work. Another activist, Aline Charney, described the campaign as a matter of karma; the Buddhist idea that the sum of a person's actions in this life will determine their fate in future existences.

The campaign was bankrolled by businessman Jean-Paul Fortom-Gouin who came to believe that stopping the commercial harvest of whales was his personal responsibility after an encounter with a whale in the Caribbean and

reading the 1968 *Dauphin, mon cousin* ('Dolphin, my cousin') by Belgian writer Robert Stenuit.

From the beginning Fortom-Gouin and his right-hand man, Johnny Lewis, had no regard for established advocacy campaign practices. Fortom-Gouin paid for Bob Hunter, the Canadian President of the newly formed group Greenpeace, to be the public face of the campaign in Australia. According to Pash, Hunter became the front man as soon as he arrived in Albany, quickly establishing a relationship with the local media and favouring those who could get his message around the world. A trained journalist, he unapologetically told reporters he was a traitor to his profession because he was not objective—he just knew that whaling was wrong.

The local Cheynes Beach Whaling Company played into the anti-whaling activists strategy. In the belief that they had nothing to hide and had a good operation in which whales were killed humanely and according to a strict quota system, the whalers let reporters onto the whaling ships—a decision which allowed the activists to build a story focused on the plight of dying whales.

The campaign had a major impact on Australian and world opinion and resulted in then Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser announcing the formation of an independent judicial inquiry into whales and whaling in March 1978. But before the former judge who headed the inquiry, Sir Sydney Frost, could hand down his findings, the Cheynes Beach Whaling Company announced they were closing operations. In announcing the decision John Sleeba explained that the inquiry had created an 'extreme reluctance' on the part of overseas buyers of their sperm oil to commit themselves to future purchases because of doubt about continuity of supply from Australia given the first term of reference was whether Australian whaling should continue or cease. In short, the campaign had successfully destroyed their market.

The Frost Report was nevertheless presented to Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser in December that year, concluding that the continuation of whaling would outrage a significant portion of the Australian population and that there was no essential human need fulfilled by

catching them. He also recommended that the Australian government pursue a policy of international opposition to whaling and ban the importation of whale products or products containing whales. The Frost Report recommendations were adopted and the *Whaling Act* 1960 repealed.

The successful campaign and the federal government ban on whaling was on the basis of emotion and the perception that killing whales offends Australians.

### Can the last whaling cultures survive?

Earlier this year at the IWC, a quota of 10 humpback whales was requested for Greenland. The quota had been approved by the IWC Scientific Committee but was refused at the plenary session with Australia, New Zealand and the European Union objecting.

After the IWC meeting, Greenland took its request to the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO) and it was approved. This was the first time NAMMCO had ever issued a quota for large whales and it did so in defiance of the IWC. A statement from the delegation from Norway gives some insight into the mood at the meeting:

The debate about management of marine mammals today is mostly emotional. It is disturbing that the attitude towards science as the basis for managing whale stocks is vanishing. This is especially important as we have based our management of wildlife in general on science. Also, we have to solve international conflicts in the environmental field (global warming, biological diversity, fishing, effects of pollution, etcetera) on a scientific basis. Whaling and sealing is not a major issue in this context, but the actions of governments in this matter may create an international precedent for similar actions in more important issues. We cannot accept that a legal activity conducted with the best practice in one country is not accepted in another country because of emotions.



As Greenland is a Danish protectorate, the Greenlandic Minister of Fisheries has now written to the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs asking that Greenland be taken out of the IWC.

Within the whaling communities of the North Atlantic and Japan many people believe that not everybody's views can be reconciled and it might be time to wind up the IWC. Glenn Inwood, an advocate for the whaling communities who works for Japan's Institute of Cetacean Research, which conducts Japan's whale research programmes in the Antarctic and western North Pacific each year, says that:

Canada, which has not been a member of the IWC since 1982, catches the most whales each year and not an eyelid is batted. It manages its whale populations very well. Norway manages its populations of minke whales and catches excellently too. Japan also manages cetaceans not under IWC control,

such as Baird's Beaked Whales, and there's no reason to say it can't manage other populations of whales just as well

While much has been made within the English-speaking world of the difference between subsistence whaling versus whaling using modern factory ships, the whaling communities are generally reluctant to make a distinction.

The more modern methods are arguably more humane with modern Norwegian whaling fleets going to great lengths to ensure their grenade tipped harpoons are matched to the size of the whale they are hunting to ensure a quick kill.

A long standing criticism of the Japanese is that they hunt in the Antarctic, a wilderness area far from their own shores. According to Masayuki and Misaki, they will continue to defend this activity on the basis that: 'It is absolute folly to leave a food resource such as the Antarctic minke alone without utilisation when it's well known that there is a robust population of them that could supply good

quality meat without harm to the natural environment or its own population.'

Environmental campaigning in the 1960s and 1970s successfully drew attention to the plight of then threatened populations of the larger species of whale including in the Antarctic. But populations of the smaller minke whales were never in danger. And by the 1980s, even many of the populations of some of the large species had stabilised. Earlier this year the humpback was taken off the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's list of species vulnerable to extinction.

It is clearly possible to have a sustainable whaling industry, but the English-speaking world has a moral, rather than scientific, objection. The moralistic and arbitrary nature of this objection is in many ways at odds with the professed values of tolerance preached by many environmentalists. As a consequence, anti-whaling campaigning continues to be seen by countries such as Japan as a form of cultural imperialism. **R**