



WHALEWATCH

It's Time To Watch Their Welfare

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Ms. Kate Sanderson
Director, Fisheries, Trade and Regional Policy
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Tinganes
Torshavn
Faroe Islands

7th October 2011

Dear Kate

We thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for producing the September 2011 information update 'Whaling in the Faroe Islands – In Brief'. Having read the document thoroughly and being mindful of recent developments, we are writing with some questions for which we hope you can provide clarification, as well as to raise some further concerns for your consideration.

Animal Welfare Issues

We appreciate the update on the development of the new hunting equipment; however the current extent and limitations of its use in grinds remain unclear. For example, although we understand that the blow-hole hook is now widely used, we also understand that there are circumstances under which the old gaff may still be applied. We would like to request clarification on what these circumstances are and what the rationale is for not prohibiting use of the old gaff altogether? With regard to the new 'spinal-lance', would you be able to clarify to what extent this piece of equipment is now in use? Are there any published studies or is there new data available that documents the efficacy of this new killing implement?

When members of Whalewatch attended meetings with you and other officials and stakeholders in May of this year, they were informed that revisions would soon be made to the Executive Order on Pilot Whaling which would incorporate regulations on the use of the new 'spinal-lance' and the blow-hole hook. We would like to request information on when the update to the Executive Order is expected and whether at that time, you propose that the use of the 'spinal-lance' will become mandatory and use of the old knife will be prohibited.

In addition, we were informed during discussions with Jústines Olsen that other measures may be put in place as part of this review, such as potential changes to the list of currently authorised whaling bays and other measures that would be aimed at improving the welfare of hunted whales. An example of such a measure is the potential restriction on the number of whales that can be driven into a bay during a grind. We would very much appreciate further information on whether these are elements that will be included in the revised Executive Order.

Human Health

Members of Whalewatch are extremely disappointed that over 400 whales have been killed this year, especially considering the particularly large number of whales that were killed in 2010. Given the small human population of the Faroe Islands and the advice on limiting consumption of whale meat issued by the government, which we are told most people now adhere to, we urge the government to seriously question the necessity to authorise hunts when there must already be a significant amount of whale meat in storage.

As you know, Whalewatch members have great concern over the human health implications of consuming pilot whale meat and blubber. We were therefore disappointed and very disturbed that the Faroese Food and Veterinary Authority advice issued in June 2011 does not make it explicit that the Faroese Chief Physician and Chief Medical Officer have again stated, as a result of their extensive scientific research, that pilot whale should not be consumed at all.

Conservation Issues

We note that in the September update, it is claimed that there is international recognition that the Faroese pilot whale hunts are 'fully sustainable'. We dispute this and feel that it is inappropriate to state this as factual information when there remain such huge gaps in knowledge regarding the current population status of small cetaceans in the North Atlantic. This is particularly relevant for pilot whales where abundance estimates are over 20 years old. However, the mention of data based on more recent surveys that will be presented at the NAMMCO annual meeting is a welcome development and we would like to request that such data be made publically available.

Finally, we would like to reaffirm our opposition to the hunts of pilot whales and other small cetaceans in the Faroe Islands, which we believe are no longer necessary for subsistence purposes and seriously and demonstrably compromise human health, animal welfare and wildlife conservation. We call upon the Faroese Government to suspend the hunts in light of these concerns. Meanwhile, we thank you for your continued willingness to engage in an open and constructive dialogue with members of our network on this issue and for your kind attention to this letter.

Yours sincerely



Joanna Toole
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On behalf of the undersigned organisations:

American Cetacean Society

Animal Welfare Institute

Campaign Whale

Dyrevaerns-Organisationernes Samarbejds-Organisation

Environmental Investigation Agency

Humane Society International

OceanCare

Society for the Conservation of Marine Mammals

Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society

World Society for the Protection of Animals

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