

# Why Is There Opposition to Whaling?

## When Whaling Was Accepted

Not long ago, whaling was more or less universally accepted. Whale oil lit lamps and kept machines running smoothly in industrial nations. Whalebone, or baleen, was used in parasol ribs and women's dresses. Whales were seen as resources to be exploited rather than thinking, feeling animals with their own intrinsic value. Whale stocks were considered limitless, or nearly so — that is, until these great animals began to disappear.

## A Long History of Exploitation

Those who oppose a return to commercial whaling point to a long history of unsustainable exploitation and mismanagement of whale stocks, one that led to the endangerment and near-extinction of many whale species.

For decades, annual catch limits established by the IWC were more than whale populations could bear. Likewise, secret and illegal whaling activity — most notably by the Soviet Union between 1951 and 1972 (according to evidence of falsified reports revealed in the early 1990's) — played a major role in nearly wiping out many whales that are still endangered to this day. Would a resumption of commercial whaling inevitably lead to a repeat of history?

## The Intrinsic Value of Whales

In the 1960's, when whale stocks were crashing and undersea exploration was on the rise, a new breed of scientists began to express concern for whales. Instead of simply warning about the depletion of a natural resource, these scientists spoke about the intrinsic value of whales, something that made many of their peers uncomfortable.

As whales were increasingly watched, filmed and studied, their high intelligence, rich social lives, and ability to feel emotion and experience pain became apparent. These revelations galvanized activists like Paul Watson, who helped start the anti-whaling movement in the 1970's. They also influenced scientists, policy makers, the public — in fact, entire nations — leading to an international moratorium on commercial whaling in 1986.

## No Reason to Hunt Whales?

Those opposed to whaling say there is no longer any reason to hunt whales in a world where petroleum has replaced whale oil, whale meat is no longer necessary for survival and we know so much about the intelligence and complex social lives of whales. We know that, when not killed instantly, it often takes 10 to 35 minutes for a whale to die once harpooned, and that they suffer.

In Japan, a 2006 Gallup poll found that 83 percent of Japanese had not eaten whale in long time, or never. As evidenced by the booming whale-watching industry, millions would rather see whales alive than dead. And the IWC continues to oppose a return to commercial whaling.



Whale-watching has become a popular tourist activity in past decades. Humpback whales, like this one, often approach and circle boats.