

## **Statement on Pilot Whales Killed in the Faroe Islands**

The undersigned environmental and animal welfare organisations are appalled at the recent expansion of whale and dolphin hunting in the Faroe Islands. This year alone, 674 long-finned pilot whales and 21 Risso's dolphins have already been killed on the Islands, raising serious conservation, welfare and human health concerns.

Pilot whales tend to migrate to the calmer waters around the Faroe Islands to give birth during April-May and June-July. Reports from a hunt of more than 200 pilot whales in Klaksvik on 19<sup>th</sup> July indicate that females with foetuses and calves with their mothers were killed. Hunting during breeding seasons is universally avoided to allow for stable populations to endure, while targeting animals accompanied by calves is expressly forbidden by the International Whaling Commission, the world's management authority on cetaceans.

Pilot whales and Risso's dolphins are protected under European law which forbids takes as a primary conservation measure. The status of cetaceans around the Faroe Islands is uncertain in many cases, and the impact of the hunts, which take entire family groups, is also unknown.

The methods used to kill whales in the Faroe Islands have been subject to international criticism since the mid 1980s. In the hunts, known as 'grinds', large family groups of whales are driven by boats into a bay where they are crudely killed. Pilot whales are known for their highly social behaviours and close-knit family groups.

Although the Faroese Government claims that significant improvements have been made, Faroese TV film of the Klaksvik hunt posted on *You-Tube*<sup>1</sup> suggests otherwise, with images of extreme cruelty apparent. The chaotic nature of driving so many whales into a small bay for slaughter using knives and hooks inevitably results in appalling and prolonged cruelty that is unacceptable in a highly modern society.

In stark contrast to the cruel nature of these hunts, the Faroese Tourist Board is keen to promote the islands for their nature and 'unspoilt natural beauty'<sup>2</sup> and boost tourism. Whilst meat from the hunts may have traditionally met subsistence needs in the islands, this has not been the case for decades.

Meat and blubber from the animals are distributed and sold in the Faroe Islands for human consumption, despite reported high levels of mercury and PCBs in the animals. Long-term research undertaken by Danish and Faroese scientists has revealed that consumption of pilot whale meat and blubber has detrimental effects on the development of foetal nervous and immune systems, and increases the risk of Parkinson's disease, hypertension and arteriosclerosis of the carotid arteries in adults.

In response to these findings, on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2008 the Faroe Islands' Chief Medical Officer and Chief Physician wrote an open letter to the Government stating that "*pilot whales today contain contaminants to a degree that neither meat nor blubber would comply with current limits for acceptable concentrations of toxic contaminants....*" They further stated, "*[I]t is recommended that pilot whale is no longer used for human consumption.*" The Government of the Faroe Islands has failed to adopt this recommendation.

The number of pilot whales killed this year so far is almost double the number killed in the whole of 2009. The estimated yield from these hunts is more than 200 tonnes of meat and more than 100 tonnes of blubber. With a population of 48,760, this equates to an astonishing 6kg of whale per person, including children and babies. If all the meat and blubber is

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<sup>1</sup> [www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Pn2Z4Bia1A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Pn2Z4Bia1A)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nowpublic.com/style/tourism-gold-faroes>

consumed it will clearly far exceed the 1998 guidelines of maximum two meals per month that the Faroese government has recommended.

The undersigned organisations urge the Faroese people to bring a permanent end to the hunting of pilot whales and other cetacean species.

## Supporting Organisations

Animal Welfare Institute, USA  
Campaign Whale, England  
Cetacean Society International  
DOSO, Denmark  
Dyrenes Venner, Denmark  
Environmental Investigation Agency, International  
Humane Society International  
OceanCare, Switzerland  
Pro Wildlife, Germany  
Society for the Conservation of Marine Mammals, Denmark  
Swiss Coalition for the Protection of Whales, Switzerland  
WDCS Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, International  
WSPA World Society for the Protection of Animals, International

## Editors' notes

### 1. 2010 cetacean catches in the Faroe Islands

Date	Place	Species and number taken
13 April	Hvalba	21 Risso's dolphins
5 June	Sandur	69 pilot whales
24 June	Vestmanna	59 pilot whales
2 July	Torshavn	17 pilot whales
8 July	Husavik	169 pilot whales
9 July	Husavik	24 pilot whales
19 July	Klaksvik	228 pilot whales
23 July	Torshavn	108 pilot whales

2. Reportedly there were no hunts at all in 2008 and three in 2007 and 2009, compared to eight so far in 2010

3. Whilst the Faroe Islands base their belief that their pilot whale hunt is sustainable both on its endurance and a single population of pilot whales that stretches from the coast of America to Europe, this is not precautionary management. Modern techniques are being used to capture the whales which means comparison with historical takes is not appropriate. The status of most cetaceans in the North East Atlantic is uncertain, and hence the takes in the Faroe Islands may be affecting the conservation status of populations. For example the status of Risso's dolphins, which seem to be rare around the UK, is unknown. The hunts in the Faroe Island directly challenge conservation efforts being made in adjacent waters.

4. The Government of the Faroe Islands noted the conclusions of its Chief Medical Officer concern, but stopped short of adopting the recommendation, suggesting that a broad and independent evaluation of the findings was necessary and that in the meantime residents should follow 1998 guidelines which recommended a maximum of two meals per month of pilot whale meat and blubber.<sup>3</sup> To date, no results from such an evaluation have been forthcoming, and the scale of the recent hunts suggests that an apparent reduction in pilot whale consumption of pilot whale during 2008 and 2009 is now being reversed.

5. Killing methods – In the hunts, pods of whales, sometimes numbering hundreds of individuals, are 'driven' into a bay by boats. The hunters use noise to scare the animals towards the shallow waters. The stress induced by this process is a welfare issue in itself. An attempt is made to beach as many whales as possible on the shore. Those not beached will flounder in the shallows and deeper water. The whales are secured for the slaughter either by striking a sharp steel hook into the body of the whale or by placing a round ended hook into the blowhole. Whales in the water are hauled to the shore by ropes attached to the hooks. A traditional whaling knife is used to cut behind the blowhole to sever vital arteries which if done accurately induces loss of consciousness and death. However the time to death of the whale from first wounding is frequently prolonged by the position of the whales and the varying levels of expertise of the slaughter men and many whales will suffer prolonged time to death.

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<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, June 2009