

Whaling in Norway

1. Overview

For decades, international headlines and political debates have focused on Japan's whaling in the Antarctic whale sanctuary and in the North Pacific as well as Iceland's hunt of endangered fin whales. Yet, at least in several years, Norway has quietly become the world's leading whaling nation, killing more whales in 2011, 2013-2016, and 2020 than Japan and Iceland combined^{1 2} (see Figure 1). From the resumption of commercial whaling in 1993 until end of 2020 Norwegian whalers have killed almost 15,000 minke whales under self-allocated quotas. This hunt, as well as exports of whale products, which in recent years have skyrocketed, are undermining the international Conventions IWC and CITES.

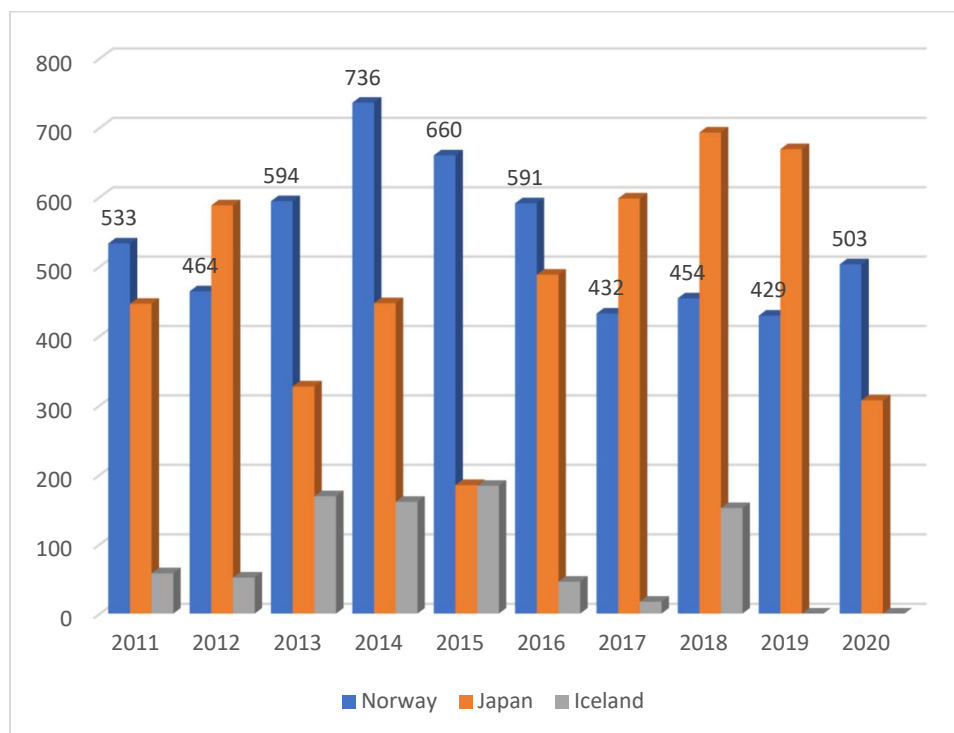


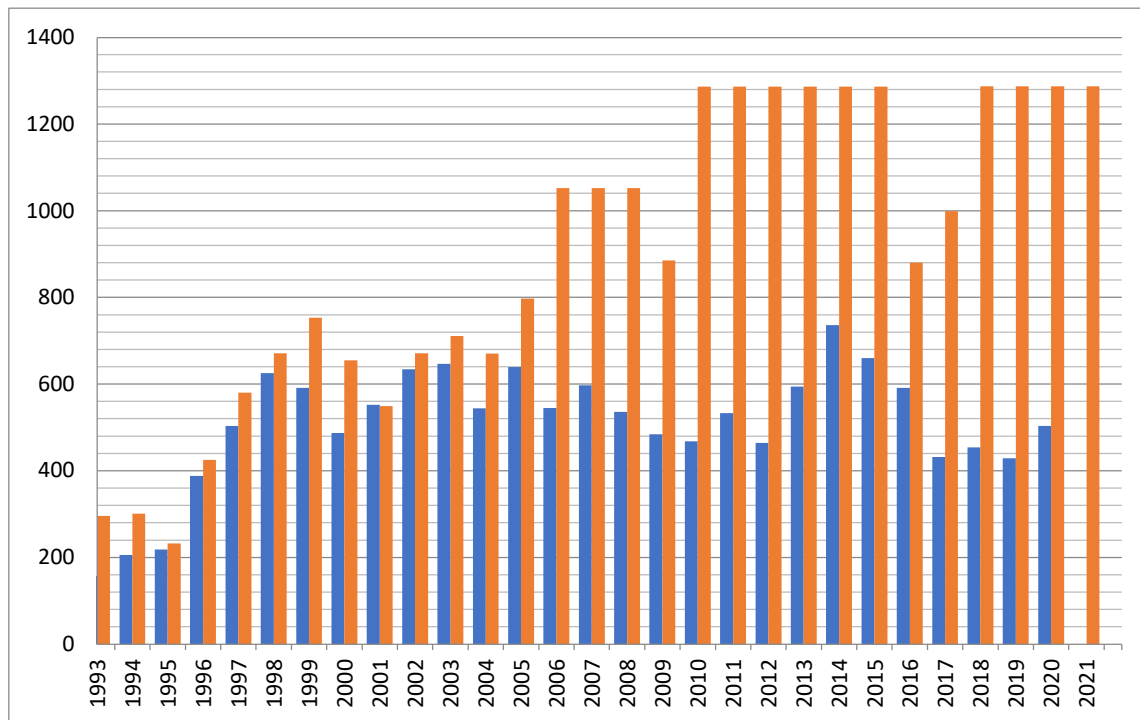
Figure 1: Whaling in Norway, Japan & Iceland

2. Whaling quotas and actual catches

While in the first years after Norway's return to commercial whaling the authorised quotas were below 300 minke whales, the Government repeatedly increased the annual quotas, particularly in 2006 (to 1052) and 2010 (to 1286 whales). However, actual catches remain far below, at numbers between 432 and 736; landing of minke whales reached its maximum in 2014, with 736 individuals killed (see Figure 2). In 2020, after several easings of requirements and regulations, 503 whales were caught, a number higher than that of the previous three years.

¹ http://www.prowildlife.de/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Norway_Frozen_in_time_2016_web.pdf

² <https://iwc.int/total-catches>



- **Length of whaling season:** The whaling season in Norway traditionally lasted from the beginning of April to the end of August. However, since 2013, whaling regulations have not included a specific end date for the season, referring instead to a continuation of whaling ‘as conditions warrant’⁶. In 2020, e.g., the whaling season ran from April 1st to September 30th ⁷.
- **Qualification of whalers:** In April 2020, in reaction to the Coronavirus crisis, up-to-date rifle shooting tests were not required, instead tests from the previous year were automatically accepted⁸. Furthermore, in May 2020, regulations were further relaxed, enabling new potential vessel, owners, who are without prior experience from whaling, to start with minke whaling, given that at least one of the crew members has participated in whaling for at least one of the last six years⁹ ¹⁰. In 2021, rifle shooting tests will be done virtually.¹¹

4. Killing methods and time-to-death data

Since 1983 penthrite grenades are used to hunt minke whales. Shooting with guns (minimum calibre 9.3 mm) is used as back-up weapon to kill whales that were not instantaneously dead from the explosive harpoon¹². In 2000, a new grenade was introduced, in order to considerably increase the instantaneous death rate (IDR) and accordingly a shorter time-to-death (TTD). While with the old harpoon the IDR was significantly lower, e.g., 62% for the period 1993-1996¹³, the IDR increased to 80% for the period 2000-2002¹⁴ and to 82% during 2011-2012¹⁵. According to the most recent data, i.e. for 2011-2012, the average TTD was one minute on average for all whales, and the TTD for not instantly dead animals was 6 minutes. A main factor for the TTD is the angle of the shot relative to the animal’s long axis. For this reason, each gunner is required to pass an annual obligatory shooting test with the rifle and harpoon gun¹⁶. But in 2020, this obligation was suspended (see above).

2011-2012 was the last period, for which Norway has presented data, published in 2015. At that time, the Expert Group of NAMMCO (the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission) recommended “that Norway continue to monitor the hunt with regard to TTD and IDR at 10-year intervals unless important issues arise that require more frequent monitoring.”¹⁷ Especially with regards to a potential impact of the continuously eased whaling regulations on animal welfare, a reporting on data for the last seasons is overdue.

5. Exports of whale products

Since 1986, minke whales are listed in CITES Appendix I, banning international commercial trade; however, Norway holds a reservation. In recent years Norway significantly increased its commercial exports of whale products (see Figure 3), with 1.17 million kg just over the last decade (2011-2020). 98.5 percent (= 1,114,993 kg) were sent to Japan, while Iceland received 37,308 kg and the Faroe

⁶ Regulations J-86-2013; J-90-2014; J-65-2015 and J-53-2016

⁷ <https://awionline.org/press-releases/norway-continues-whale-slaughter-2021-hunting-quota>

⁸ <https://www.miljodirektoratet.no/aktuelt/nyheter/2020/april-2020/skyteproven-fra-i-fjor-gjelder-ogsaa-under-arets-jakt/>, April 2020

⁹ <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/ny-side6/id2704527/>

¹⁰ <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/fa482b5b9b34492aa3d35920878ef30f/kgl.res.-forskrift-om-endringer-i-forskrifter-fastsatt-med-hjemmel-i-deltakerloven-og-havressurslova.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.fiskeridir.no/Yrkesfiske/Nyheter/2021/soknad-for-a-delta-i-arets-hvalfangst-er-apnet>

¹² <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/7572449/>

¹³ <http://nammco.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/nammco-report-expert-group-on-assessing-large-whale-killing-data-2010.pdf>

¹⁴ see footnote 13

¹⁵ <https://nammco.no/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/doc-8-norwegian-minke-whale-hunt.pdf>

¹⁶ see footnote 13

¹⁷ <http://nammco.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/report-of-expert-group-meeting-on-ttd-data-for-large-whales.pdf>

Islands 13,992 kg¹⁸. With these exports the Norwegian Government not only undermines the strict protection of minke whales under CITES, it also ignores a series of CITES Notifications recommending “that the Parties agree not to issue any import or export permit, or certificate for introduction from the sea, under this Convention for primarily commercial purposes for any specimen of a species or stock protected from commercial whaling by the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling”¹⁹.

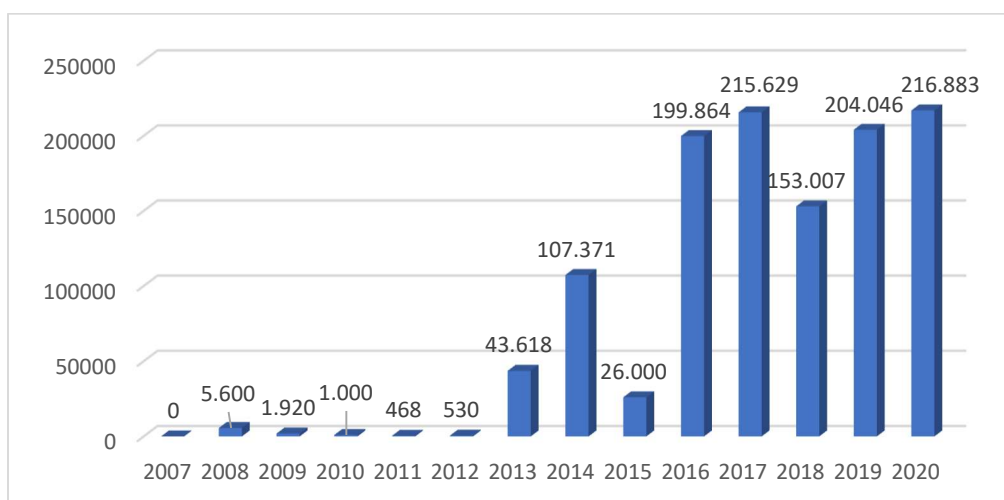


Figure 3: Commercial exports of whale products by Norway (in kg)

6. Conclusions & Recommendations

With Japan having left the IWC in 2019 and Iceland pausing any commercial whaling since 2019, Norway is presently the only IWC Member State, which is conducting commercial whaling, under its formal objection against the IWC Moratorium. With these commercial hunts and the recently sharply increased commercial exports Norway is ignoring both the provisions of the IWC and CITES.

The Norwegian Government has taken a series of measures to encourage the maintenance and even expansion of commercial whaling activities.

Since 2001, the IWC has failed to pass a Resolution on commercial whaling, although this should be a core matter, given the fact that its Moratorium on commercial whaling is still in place.

We therefore call on the European Union and its Member States to

- a) request at the forthcoming IWC 68 Meeting time-to-death and IDR data for the last five whaling seasons in Norway**
- b) consider a Resolution on commercial whaling for the IWC 69 – which would not only target Norway’s whaling but any eventual resumption of whaling in Iceland**
- c) urge Norway to stop authorizing whaling quotas and issuing CITES export permits, using the full range of diplomatic measures at their disposal;**

¹⁸ CITES Trade Database: search for exports from Norway of *Balaenoptera acutorostrata* with the purpose code “T” (= commercial trade), conducted on 10 March, 2021.

¹⁹ <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/notif/E-Notif-2020-003.pdf> , <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/notif/E-Notif-2015-020> , and <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/notif/2012/E010.pdf>