

Whaling meeting delays decision on hunting 1 year

June 25 2010, By ARTHUR MAX , Associated Press Writer



FILE - In this Jan 23, 2009 file photo provided by Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service, a pod of sperm whales are seen stranded on a sand bar off Perkins Island, Australia's Tasmania state. Levels of cadmium, aluminum, chromium, lead, silver, mercury and titanium together are the highest ever found in marine mammals, scientists who spent five years shooting nearly 1,000 sperm whales with tissue-sampling darts say, warning that the health of both ocean life and the people who consume seafood could be at risk. (AP Photo/Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service, File)

(AP) -- The body that regulates whaling was ending its annual meeting Friday with no decision on whether to authorize limited hunting for profit to curb unrestrained killing in the Earth's most sensitive oceans.

In another defeat for conservation-minded countries, the International Whaling Commission authorized Greenland's native population to hunt a

few humpback whales for the next three years, expanding the list of species the Greenlanders are allowed to kill under the license of subsistence hunting.

Denmark, speaking for its autonomous territory, offered to lower Greenland's catch of endangered fin whales by seven in a trade-off for nine humpbacks. The debate moved into the final hours of the five-day annual meeting and ended when opponents agreed to stand aside and let the proposal pass in a silent vote of consensus.

Commission rules allow indigenous people, including U.S. Inuit in Alaska, the right to hunt for food and to maintain traditional cultures, but under strict quotas that are reviewed every five years.

The World Society for the Protection of Animals condemned the decision as "tragic." It said an investigation two years ago showed about one-fourth of the whales the Greenlanders caught were sold on the market in violation of the commission's rules.

In the past, the renewal of subsistence quotas have led to bitter clashes.

U.S. Whaling Commissioner Monica Medina complained in a statement Thursday that the quotas for native peoples "continue to be used as a bargaining chip by both pro- and anti-whaling governments seeking something in return."

The indigenous issue was overshadowed by the failure earlier in the week to strike a deal on suspending a 1986 moratorium on [commercial whaling](#) for 10 years in exchange for a promise by Japan, Norway and Iceland to reduce the number of animals they kill in defiance of the ban, now about 1,500 a year.

Later Friday the commission was expected to adopt a resolution

postponing further negotiations for one year, observing a "cooling off" period.

Most environment groups called the breakdown a setback to efforts to save the Earth's shrunken population of whales. Others said lifting the ban - one of the most effective conservation measures in history - would be a fatal mistake since there was no guarantee it could be reimposed at the end of the 10-year suspension.

"I think the whales lost. In the end of the day more whales will be killed," said Susan Lieberman of the Pew Environment Group.

Conservation groups estimate 1.5 million [whales](#) were killed in the 20th century, pushing the largest species like the blue whale to the brink of extinction.

Today, Japanese factory ships regularly raid whale stocks in the waters around Antarctica that the commission declared a no-take zone in 1994 to protect the migratory animals in their most fertile feeding ground. Japan claims the right to hunt under the commission's exemption for scientific research, but nearly all the meat ends up in restaurants.

Unable to compromise after a determined push this week, some delegates suggested the talks should move outside the commission to a higher political platform - at least the level of Cabinet ministers.

"There are no winners and losers in this," said Sir Geoffrey Palmer, New Zealand's former prime minister. "It ain't over til it's over, and even then it ain't over. There will be a pause. We will resume discussions about this next year," he told The Associated Press.

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