

Scientists Find Whales Innocent of Global Decline in Fisheries

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The argument that great whales are behind declining fish stocks has absolutely no scientific foundation, according to leading researchers and members of conservation organizations who spoke at the International Whaling Commission's 60th meeting today in Santiago, Chile.

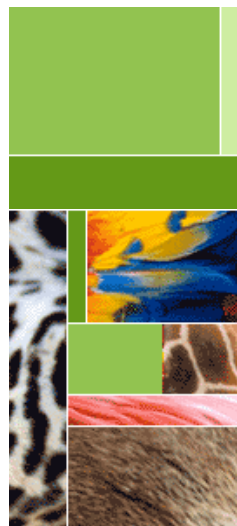
In its opening day, representatives from Humane Society International, World Wildlife Fund and the Lenfest Ocean Program presented three reports debunking the science behind "whales-eat-fish" claims often made by whaling nations Japan, Norway and Iceland. Such arguments have been used to bolster support for whaling, particularly from developing nations.

"It is not the whales, it is overfishing and excess fishing capacity that are responsible for diminishing supplies of fish in developing countries," said fisheries biologist Dr. Daniel Pauly, director of the University of British Columbia Fisheries Centre. "Making whales into scapegoats serves only to benefit wealthy whaling nations while harming developing nations by distracting any debate on the real causes of the declines of their fisheries."

Who's eating all the fish? The food security rationale for culling cetaceans examines the final destination of catches from coastal fisheries in the South Pacific, Caribbean and West Africa. Less than half the catch goes to domestic markets and the majority of the catch supplies markets of affluent countries in the European Union, Japan, North America and, increasingly, China. "One can speak of fish migrating from the more needy to the less needy," the report states.

Also presented to the IWC Scientific Committee were the preliminary results from an analysis of the interaction between whales and commercial fisheries in Northwest Africa. The modeling, supported by the Lenfest Ocean Program, shows no real competition between local or foreign fisheries and great whales.

The great whales spend only a few months in the area during their vast seasonal migrations, eat relatively little while breeding and tend to consume fundamentally different types of food resources than the marine species targeted by both local and foreign fisheries.



When models are designed which presume that whales are eating species important to the fishing industry, those models still fail to show that great whales are a significant source of competition to fishing, the report concluded.

Also released today is a review of the scientific literature originating from Japan and Norway, the two countries most strongly promoting the idea that whales pose problems for fisheries. The review, funded by WWF, found significant flaws in much of the science and concluded that "where good data are available, there is no evidence to support the contention that whale predation presents an ecological issue for fisheries."

Dr. Susan Lieberman of WWF said, "These three reports provide yet more conclusive evidence that great whales are not responsible for the degraded state of the world's fisheries. It is now time for governments to focus on the real reason for fisheries decline — unsustainable fishing operations."

Patricia Forkan, president of Humane Society International, said, "Dr. Pauly's findings should refute, once and for all, the misconception that whales are eating all the fish and need to be killed to protect the world's fisheries."

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