

Future for Whales

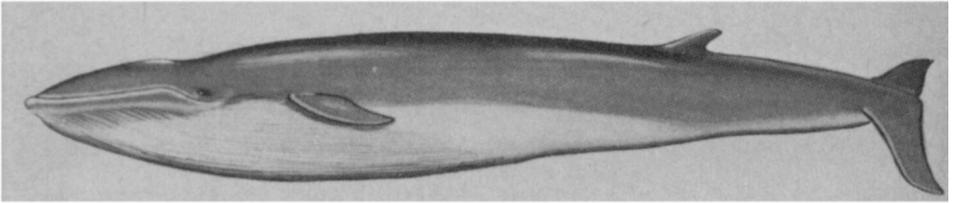
Richard Fitter

Pie still remains in the sky as far as the hard-pressed fin whale is concerned, following the 26th meeting of the International Whaling Commission in London in June. But the sky has got perceptibly nearer. After the 1973 IWC meeting fin whaling stood to end in 1976; now it should end in 1975—provided the outcome of an Australian resolution is not denounced by Japan and Russia under the 90-day rule that makes the IWC so ineffective. The Australian resolution provided for a total moratorium on all protection stocks, defined as stocks whose annual increment does not maintain the population, so that the fin whale seems bound to be included. The other whales currently being hunted, the sei, minke and sperm whales, are still within the maximum sustainable yield, but there is every reason to fear that, if whaling continues, they too will have to be classed as protection stocks.

The arguments of those scientists who support the ten-year moratorium (agreed at Stockholm in 1972 but never accepted by the IWC) arise from uncertainties about the data on which whale stock assessments are made; these come almost entirely from only one or a few of the whaling countries. It is notorious, but rarely referred to in print, that hardly any data, apart from routine statistics, come from the Soviet Union, while the stock and yield estimates of Japanese whale biologists are almost invariably higher than those made by whale biologists of other nationalities. Moreover, extraordinarily little critical attention has been paid to the assumptions that underlie the stock assessments, which are rarely spelt out. It is often assumed, for example, that a whale stock heavily depleted by man will recover if left alone; this is no more than an article of faith without any scientific justification whatever. Thus, although the eastern gray whale stock has in fact recovered, the western gray whale stock seems to be extinct, and neither the bowhead nor the Atlantic right whale have recovered. There are also more fundamental areas of doubt, such as the common assumption that animal stocks being examined by biologists are in balance with their environment, and, after man-induced disturbance, will return by natural processes to an equivalent state in an unchanged environment. In fact the more one looks at whale resource management the more striking its penumbra of uncertainty becomes.

IUCN Statement

IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) made a forthright statement at the recent IWC meeting, reaffirming its support for the Stockholm whaling resolution, deploring the repudiation by Japan and Russia of three major conservation agreements made at the 1973 meeting, and calling for a comprehensive world programme of research on living as well as dead whales. In addition IUCN was concerned that several countries, notably Chile and Peru, still carry on whaling outside the IWC, and that the growing



Fin Whale

use of flags of convenience provides numerous loopholes in the already dangerously loose international arrangements for conserving whale stocks. IUCN was able to report to IWC that a meeting of its Whale Specialist Group held at Morges in May 1974 had established priorities for an initial series of research projects on protected and endangered whales.

The FPS statement, presented by the Hon. Secretary, fully supported the IUCN statement, especially in deploring Japan's and Russia's repudiation of the majority decisions of the last IWC meeting, and in the need for more reliable data on which to found management policies. Chile and Peru, the statement continued,

two whaling nations of great importance in the eastern Pacific region, have more than once been invited to adhere to the Convention, but these approaches have always come to naught, the reason given being that these two nations belong to the South Pacific Permanent Commission. A limited co-operation has developed between the two commissions. Occasionally an observer from either the South Pacific Commission or Chile or Peru has attended one of our meetings. But I believe we have only once had an observer at one of the SPC's meetings. We hope of course that both Chile and Peru will decide to adhere to the Convention. But if they do not, could not a determined effort be made to exchange observers between the two commissions? Equally important, could not Chile and Peru or the SPC itself be invited to send observers to this Commission's Scientific Committee? We would urge also similar initiatives with Spain and Portugal. The change in government might make Portugal more responsive.

The results of the 1973/74 whaling season were reported to the IWC by the Bureau of International Whaling Statistics in Norway. Four Japanese and three Russian expeditions operated in the Antarctic last winter; their catches were:

	1973/4	Quota	1972/3
Fin	1288	1450	1761
Sei and Bryde's	4392	4500	3664
Minke	7713	5000	—

The Japanese and Russians refused to accept the 5000 minke whale quota for 1973/4 agreed by the IWC and substituted a larger one of their own, 8000. In addition, 4203 sperm whales were caught in the Antarctic, and a total of 19,317 whales of all kinds (16,248 in 1973) were caught outside the Antarctic by twelve land stations and six factory ships.

Quotas for 1974/75 were fixed as follows by the IWC, with last year's quota in brackets:

Antarctic	Fin	1000 (1450)
	Sei & Bryde's	4000 (4500)
	Minke	7000 (5000)
S Hemisphere	Sperm	8000 male, 5000 female (no change)
	N Pacific	Fin
	Sei & Bryde's	2000 (3000)
	Sperm	6000 male, 4000 female (no change)

These quotas are expected to permit the restoration of the fin whale stocks to continue, and are at or below the replacement yield of the other species. Quotas were again fixed for each of three regions in the southern hemisphere.

Lord Derby's Eland

A group of the rare Lord Derby's eland *Taurotragus d. derbianus* in the Niokola-Koba National Park in Senegal, where numbers are believed to have increased to over 300—the only population that is increasing. In the Ivory Coast and The Gambia they are probably extinct, and are seen only rarely in Mali. The photograph is reproduced from *Les Parcs Nationaux de la République Du Sénégal* a full, well illustrated account by the Conservator of National Parks, A. R. Dupuy. In a foreword the Prime Minister of Senegal speaks of the government's determination to protect the country's national parks and wildlife.

