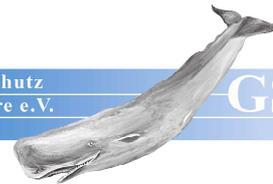




Gesellschaft zum Schutz  
der Meeressäugetiere e.V.



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## Joint NGO Statement on Pilot whales killed in the Faroe Islands

September 6, 2012

The undersigned environmental and animal welfare organisations are very concerned about the high number of pilot whales killed in the Faroe Islands this year. Through to 24<sup>th</sup> August, 590 long-finned pilot whales have been killed on the Islands in 2012. Since the beginning of 2010 2,423 pilot whales have been killed on the Islands raising serious human health, animal welfare and conservation concerns.

### Consumption and Health Risk

Meat and blubber from the animals are distributed and sold in the Faroe Islands for human consumption, despite evidence of high levels of mercury and PCBs. 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, arteriosclerosis of the carotid arteries in adults, and Type II diabetes.

The Faroe Islands' Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientist have jointly issued health warnings several times. In an open letter to the Government on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2008, they stated that pilot whale should no longer be used for human consumption. This conclusion has recently been repeated in the review article published in 2012, "*Dietary recommendations regarding pilot whale meat and blubber in the Faroe Islands*" by Pál Weihe and Høgni Debes Joensen, based on additional long-term cohort studies.

### **Scientific agreement**

There is broad scientific agreement on the strong link between mercury in cetacean (whale, dolphin and porpoise) products and a variety of human diseases and medical conditions, including Parkinson's disease, arteriosclerosis, immune suppression and hypertension. Threats to children include autism, Asperger's Syndrome and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

In July 2012 at its Annual Meeting, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) adopted by consensus a resolution proposed by the EU IWC members including Denmark, requesting increased cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO). It encourages the WHO to review scientific publications regarding contaminants in cetacean products and provide updated advice for consumers. It also urges governments to remain vigilant in responsibly informing consumers of health effects associated with the consumption of polluted cetacean products, and taking steps to counter any negative effects based on rigorous scientific advice and clear risk assessments.

Unfortunately the Government of the Faroe Islands has failed so far to adopt the recommendations of its own scientific experts to end the consumption of pilot whale, and instead supports continuation of the grinds and the consumption of these polluted whale products. Indeed, if all the meat and blubber of the 590 whales killed this year is consumed, it will by far exceed the Faroese Government's June 2011 guidelines that recommend a maximum of one meal per month.

### **Animal Welfare and Conservation**

Pilot whales tend to migrate to the calmer waters around the Faroe Islands to give birth from April to July. Pilot whale hunts frequently occur during the breeding season despite there being agreement internationally that hunting during breeding seasons should be avoided to allow for stable populations to endure. For this reason targeting animals accompanied by calves is expressly forbidden by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) - the world's expert cetacean management authority. The status of cetaceans that occur around the Faroe Islands is uncertain in many cases and the impacts of the hunts which take entire family groups is also unknown. Pilot whales are protected under European law, which prohibits takes as a primary conservation measure. Many of the pilot whales that occur in Faroese waters also travel to EU waters.

The methods used to kill whales in the Faroe Islands have been subject to international criticism for decades. In the hunts, known as 'grinds', large family groups of whales are driven by boats into a bay where they are crudely killed with hooks and knives. Pilot whales are known for their highly social behaviours and close-knit family groups. Although Faroese authorities claim killing methods have improved, there is no documentary evidence to prove this. The grinds are a lengthy process that also involves extreme distress for the whales associated with the chasing, separation of social groups, and individual whales experiencing close family members being slaughtered. This is in addition to the inherent cruelty associated with the killing methods.

In conclusion and in consideration of the serious concerns raised, the undersigned organisations urge the Faroese people to bring a permanent end to the hunting of pilot whales and other cetacean species for the benefit of human health, animal welfare and conservation.

Animal Welfare Institute  
Campaign Whale  
Cetacean Society International  
DOSO( Dyreværns Organisationernes SamarbejdsOrganisation)  
Dyrenes Venner  
Environmental Investigation Agency  
Humane Society International  
OceanCare  
Pro Wildlife  
Selskab til Bevarelse af Havpattedyr/GSM  
WDCS