

Prime Minister Kaj Leo Holm Johannesen,
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Tinganes,
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Faroe Islands.



8th August 2013

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Dear Prime Minister Johannesen,

I write on behalf of the undersigned organisations to express our concern about the continued hunting of pilot whales in the Faroe Islands. We are dismayed to learn of the slaughter of 267 pilot whales in Fuglafjørður on 30th July. Consistent with our previous correspondence with you, we reaffirm our opposition to the hunts and sincere concern about the inherent cruelty inflicted upon the whales.

While we firmly maintain that the hunts must be phased out altogether for the sake of the whales and the humans who consume them, we have some specific concerns relating to the recent hunt in Fuglafjørður, which we believe was exceptionally inhumane and poorly managed. We hope you will take immediate steps to prevent a recurrence of this event, including through the adoption of new regulations.

1. Hunt at Fuglafjørður on 30th July

We believe that this hunt clearly illustrates the problems inherent in trying to ensure that even the most basic animal welfare standards are met in pilot whale drive hunts and would encourage you to review its conduct.

The decision to allow such a large number of whales to be driven into the bay, ostensibly with the intention of killing them all, was indefensible. It led to excessive suffering for a very large number of animals over a period of approximately 1.5 hours. Evidence of previous hunts involving large numbers of whales indicates that it is impossible to drive all the whales onto the beach, which is necessary in order to quickly restrain them for the slaughter. Consequently, large numbers of whales remain in distress in the deeper water for prolonged periods of time. Lodging the round-ended hook in the whales' blowholes in the deeper water and dragging them to shore for slaughter extends the unacceptable suffering imposed on the whales.

We see, for example, from the photos of the Fuglafjørður hunt published in the Faroese media that some whales were secured from boats and by men wading and swimming in deep water. It appears that it required several men to drag each whale through the water onto the shore, presumably with the round-ended hook embedded in the blowhole. Overall, the photos expose a scene of chaos and not the orderly dispatch of a group of whales depicted in Faroese publicity materials on pilot whaling.

In addition, the decision to drive approximately half of this large pod ashore, despite the fact that only four men had arrived on the beach to restrain and kill them, was a grave error. This ratio of slaughtermen to whales

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meant that even the stranded animals could not be slaughtered immediately, subjecting them to increased suffering, fear and distress as their family members were killed around them. Such extreme cruelty is unacceptable.

2. New regulations for hunt licenses and slaughter method restrictions

We understand that the new regulations will require those who wish to participate in a grind to be licensed, after receiving proper instruction on the laws governing the hunt and training in the methods permitted to kill the animals. However, we are disappointed that these measures will not come into effect before 1st May 2015 and that in the interim people will be able to participate in the driving and killing of whales without the necessary training.

We also understand that the new regulations will restrict the implements used during a grind to only the round-ended hook and the new spinal lance with the traditional hook and knife relegated for use only under exceptional circumstances with permission from the grind foreman. Whilst we welcome the new restrictions on use of the traditional implements, we remain extremely concerned about the new implements' high potential to impose extreme suffering on the pilot whales.

According to eye witness accounts, some hunters forcibly drive the round-ended hook down the blowhole into the nasal cavity, as opposed to laterally into the vestibular sacs, increasing the potential to cause pain from damage to the sensitive internal structures. Furthermore, in smaller animals the blowhole hook entirely blocks the air supply, doubtless causing extreme stress. In larger animals the hook prevents the blowhole from closing leaving a gap into which seawater can enter the lungs, also causing extreme panic and injury. We do not, therefore, believe that the blowhole hook constitutes a humane way to secure and manoeuvre a whale. Indeed, the NAMMCO Expert Group on the Assessment of Hunting Methods for Small Cetaceans has stated that it cannot accept the assumption that the blunt hook is not painful as, "the blowhole, like nostrils in terrestrial animals probably are [sic] sensitive to stretching and strain."¹

The new spinal lance can only be effectively used if the whale is stranded on the shore and restrained so that the lance can be correctly placed for effective severing of the spinal column and the blood supply to the brain. Again, this is corroborated by experts in the field, who have stated that a critical factor in the effective use of the new lance is the angle with which the lance is thrust into the neck of the whale.² As indicated above, if whales are not stranded on shore and restrained, the lance cannot be even remotely considered an efficient, effective, or humane killing tool.

Based on the foregoing evidence, we are not convinced that these new implements will reduce the cruelty and suffering inherent in these hunts. Upon receipt of an English translation of the new regulations, we intend to provide further commentary at that point. For now, we seek clarification on the justification for the nearly two year delay in implementing the regulations and what exceptional circumstances would allow a grind foreman to permit the use of the traditional implements.

While we continue to have concerns over the human health implications of consuming pilot whale products and other issues relating to pilot whaling, animal welfare concerns alone sufficiently justify our continued opposition to the hunts. Because the entire process of the hunts, from chase and round-up, to eventual

¹Comments were made with respect to the presented statistics, and the underlying assumption that the blunt hook is not painful for the animal. The Expert Group could not accept this assumption as the blowhole like nostrils in terrestrial mammals probably are sensitive to stretching and strain. The general opinion of the Expert Group was that TTD should be recorded from the time the blunt hook is inserted into the blowhole, as is the case with the iron gaff until further investigations (i.e. gross post mortem and histological examination of affected tissues in the blowhole) have been undertaken and shown the opposite." NAMMCO Expert Group Meeting to Assess the Hunting Methods for Small Cetaceans. 15 – 17 November 2011, Copenhagen, Denmark.

²op.cit.

slaughter involves a high degree of sustained and acute distress combined with the chaos of coordinating communal participation in these hunts, we remain firmly opposed to their continuation.

We urge you to immediately prohibit the taking of large groups of whales and to swiftly bring the hunting of pilot whales in the Faroe Islands to a permanent end. We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Jennifer Lonsdale

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Letter also sent to Minister of Fisheries Jacob Vestergaard

cc: Sýslumenn; Ólavur Sjúrdaberg, Formaður Grindamannafelagsins

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