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## How Do We Feel about Whaling?

The C.W.Nicol Afan Woodland Trust  
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In 1972 the United States passed the Marine Mammal Protection Act, prohibiting the hunting and killing of marine mammals, and also banning import and export of all marine mammal products.

In 1971 twelve American and Canadian activists chartered a boat and sailed to the nuclear test site of Amchitka, Alaska. Within a year, the US government cancelled the Alaskan nuclear tests and in Canada especially, the Greenpeace activists were hailed as modern heroes.

In 1975 Greenpeace, based then in Vancouver, launched its first anti-whaling campaign.

I had returned from studying fisheries and Japanese language in Japan in 1972, taking up a position with the Freshwater Institute based in Winnipeg, doing mostly environmental assessment work linked to the proposal to build a gas pipeline from the Arctic Ocean down the Mackenzie River Valley. In 1974 I moved to Vancouver to take up the position of Emergency Officer with the Canadian Environmental Protection Service.

It was at that time in Vancouver that I was invited, privately, to take part in meetings and discussions about the new Greenpeace plan to protest Japanese commercial whaling in the North Pacific. I was not opposed to whaling, but I fully supported the right to protest. I was worried about safety issues and with slides, showed Greenpeace members the dangers of a catcher's bow wave and of a harpoon line lashing the water. I strongly advised against running in front of a moving vessel, but they ignored my advice.

At that time it seemed that the anti-whaling campaign was turning into an anti-Japanese propaganda. I felt that I must do my best to defend the whalers, many of whom I considered to be friends. Various untruths were bandied about at that time. For example, that the Japanese were killing the last of the blue whales for pet food? Blatantly untrue.

One day in North Vancouver I was driving my son Kentaro to a Cub Scout meeting with three other little boys. One of the lads suddenly said

"I hate Japs!"

I stopped the car and asked him what he meant. Did he not know that Kentaro's mother was Japanese? The boy replied that he didn't hate Kentaro, or his mother, but that the 'Japanese are killing all the whales'.

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When I asked where he heard this, the lad said that his teacher had told him. I knew the teacher, a woman with no experience or learning about whaling. My son and his two younger sisters attended the same school.

I confronted the school principal and asked if he would allow me to come and talk to the children, to give a more balanced view and to tell about whaling as I had observed it, with slides taken of whaling by Japanese, Norwegian and Canadian whalers off both Pacific and Atlantic Canadian coasts, together and of Inuit hunting beluga in Baffin Island. The principal refused. Thus, a biased anti-whaling view was being taught in Canadian schools! I was very angry.

When I spoke out in the Canadian media about this anti-Japanese bias and the untruths used in those early anti-whaling campaigns I was scolded by my bosses and told that as I was no longer involved in marine mammal research, I had no right to voice my opinions in public. Then came the hate mail.

A respite came when I was seconded to become the Assistant Manager of the Canadian pavilion at the International Ocean Exposition in Okinawa. While there I met the mayor and the marine zoologist of the Taiji town aquarium. I was really surprised to learn that the Mayor, Mr. Seko, had been born in Canada, when his father was a salmon fisherman on the Skeena River before the war.

In 1978, I quit my job in Canada, and went to live Taiji, Wakayama prefecture. Taiji is probably the oldest whaling community in Japan. My aim was to research and write a historical novel on Japanese whaling at a time when the intense activities of foreign whalers was causing a great stir in this isolated nation. I hoped that an understanding of history and culture would help to ease the strident anti-Japanese tone of the whaling issue.

After a year in Taiji, during which time I also visited other whaling communities in Japan, I was invited to join the Japanese whaling fleet in the Antarctic and to observe the 1980 hunt for minke whales. Japan took 3279 minke whales in the Antarctic that season, while the Soviet Union ships took 3702 (selling most of the meat to Japan). The numbers of minke and other whales delighted me, and I felt admiration for the seamanship, courage and skill of the Japanese whalers.

The first draft of my novel (called 'Isana' in English and 'Harpoon' in English, French and Italian. In German the same novel was called 'Der letzte Samurai' -The last samurai? - predating but nothing to do with the movie of the same name) was written aboard the mother ship heading home to Japan.

Getting a book published is not easy, and nobody wanted to publish a book that showed Japanese whaling - albeit traditional, with swift, man-powered boats with high prows and beautifully lacquered hulls - in a positive light, so I gathered enough rejection slips to paper a wall. After a lot of polishing, the novel finally saw the light in 1987. It became a best seller in Japan.

By the middle of 19th century there were reportedly some seven hundred foreign whaling

ships, mostly American, hunting for oil and baleen off the coast of Japan. Japan's Shogunate government would only allow Dutch trading ships to land in Nagasaki, and no ships of any kind or nationality were allowed to land elsewhere. The American whaling industry lobbied for their navy to force Japan to open. In 1853 an American squadron of powerful warships under the command of Commodore M.C. Perry sailed to Japan with politely worded demands that American ships and crew, with whalers being especially worded, be protected and allowed to shelter and take on water and other supplies. This caused great turmoil and civil war in the country and the Shogun was overthrown. A new era began in 1867 when Japan began to modernise pretty well everything- including Norwegian-style whaling with steam ships and whaling cannon, first introduced at Taiji by Norwegian whalers and a captured Russian vessel after the Imperial Navy under Admiral Togo defeated the Russians at the Battle of Tsushima in 1905.

My own contacts with Japan began in 1962. After three expeditions to the Canadian arctic, and having practised Judo in England, I came to Japan to study martial arts. In the two and a half years it took to get my first dan black belt in Karate, I fell in love with the country and married a Japanese girl.

In 1965 I returned to Canada to take up the position of marine mammal technician with the Arctic Research Station of the Fisheries Research Board of Canada. I had hoped to return to the arctic, but was instead assigned to research on large whales. The Canadian government had just granted a Norwegian-Canadian sealer with a permit for a joint Canadian-Norwegian project to hunt fin whales off the Atlantic coast of Nova Scotia. A new young American scientist called Ed Mitchell, was supposed to be joining the Canadian Fisheries Research board to handle this whaling research, but he was still finishing his PhD thesis, so for the first season I would have to handle all sampling and data collection by myself.

At the time I had some experience working with seals, so in order to learn how to sample and measure whales I sent out to the Pacific Coast, where a joint Japanese-Canadian operation were already hunting sei and sperm whales out of Coal Harbour on Vancouver Island. Research on this hunt was being managed by the Fisheries Research Board Station in Nanaimo.

The fisheries technician in Coal Harbour gave me all the help he could, and the Japanese flensers were extremely friendly and helpful, perhaps because I could speak Japanese and was interested in everything they did. The whale meat landed at Coal Harbour was being frozen and shipped to Japan for human consumption, while oil and whale meal were being sold elsewhere.

That summer I was assigned to Blandford, Nova Scotia, and there with my Japanese wife, I rented a tiny cottage close enough to the harbour that I could hear the ships coming in. The Norwegian catcher was bringing in fin whales, but as they did not have a winch or a slip, the whales were being flensed in the water, with the whale floating between the ship and the dock. This was very wasteful, and the meat was being sold to fox and minke farms, not for human

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consumption. With the whale in the water it was impossible to get accurate measurements.

They finally did install a slip and a cutting deck at Blandford, but still the meat was sold as animal feed. There were several occasions at that operation when lactating or undersized whales were brought in, all of which I reported, to little avail.

The Kyokuyo Whaling Company of Japan now negotiated with to start another joint whaling venture based out of Dildo, Newfoundland. I was re-assigned to this operation as an observer aboard catcher No. 17 Kyomaru, and to train other technicians to gather data and samples from landed whales. This operation was very well run, with no waste, no illegal whales taken, and all meat being frozen and sent to Japan to feed people.

Taiyo Fisheries, another Japanese company, also negotiated to open yet another shore station in Newfoundland. This now made three operations hunting the same migrating stock of fin whales. This didn't seem sensible to me, but hey, I was just a lowly technician... already the whalers were having to go further and further out to sea to get their whales. Despite concerns about taking too many fin whales from this stock, I was very impressed with the courage and seamanship of the Japanese whalers. I respected and liked these men, and besides had already gained preference for whale meat.

In those years very few people seemed to be against whaling as such, although some were concerned that we were taking too many.

The Arctic Biological Station also sent me on research expeditions to Baffin Island to gather data on the Inuit seal hunt. Seal meat, blubber and skins were essential to Inuit well-being, and the cost of modern rifles, engines, ammunition and gasoline was mostly covered by the sale of seal skins to Europe.

I was also sent to collect data and sample from the annual hunt of harp seal pups in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. By this time, in the 1960's, there was a lot of protest about the killing of these cute, fluffy white baby seals, and some individuals and organizations were waking up to the fact that campaigns to 'save seals' - or dolphins, or whales, could make a lot of money and gain the campaigners celebrity status.

When the US passed the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and when several European nations stopped importing sealskins, the people worst affected were the Inuit. The Canadian Inuit that I knew became very angry and bitter.

It is now 2010. Almost forty years have passed since the very public and divisive debate on killing whales, seals and dolphins began. Despite all the meetings and discussions the divide gets worse.

The recent film 'The Cove' - acclaimed in the West and maligned in Japan has certainly made the debate even more emotional and angry.

We cannot ignore people's feelings.

I had some doubts about coming here, but flattered and pleased at being asked and of course, delighted to meet you all. However, I am not currently involved in marine mammal research, nor am I involved in any organised campaigns for or against the taking of marine

mammals for human food. However, I have observed hunts for marine mammals all over the world and I thoughts and feelings that have come together over the years.

I spoke out against the Taiji dolphin hunt as strongly as I could when I first saw it in 1979. I felt that this was cruel and took far too many dolphins from the same gene pools. It can be argued that drives of dolphins and pilot whales have been carried out in parts of Japan for a long time. However, can we claim that this Taiji dolphin hunt is truly a Japanese tradition? They use high speed boats with powerful engines, communicating by radio, and making loud underwater noises by banging with hammers on steel pipes lashed to the boats, creating an underwater bedlam that terrifies whole schools of dolphins, driving them into a small bay which is then netted off. The hunters I saw in 1979 did not use harpoons - these used crude spears, with ropes attached. The panicked dolphins were speared and wounded, they not secured by harpoon for a quick kill. I observed one dolphin thrash itself into the rocks, taking forty-five minutes to die. That is a disgrace. A true seal, whale or walrus hunter either kills with a quick shot to the head then secures the animal before it sinks, or, far better, they first secure the quarry with a harpoon, then do their best to kill the animal with a brain shot or a quickly lethal thrust.

I tried to talk to the Taiji men at the time, back in 1979, but they would not listen. I knew that once this slaughter became known, the protest would be loud, angry and very international. It would give great ammunition for various campaigns. I went especially to Tokyo back in 1979 and spoke to a senior official with the Japanese Fisheries Agency. That person almost sneered and said;

“What difference does it make? They die anyway.”

Of course, it mattered little to him, he hadn't seen the dolphin kill and would soon retire. Better not rock the boat. I was if anything pro-whaling, but this made me furious. Damn it, Japan has laws against causing suffering to animals!

I have written and spoke out against this dolphin hunt, not because they take dolphins for food, but because the kill is clumsy and inhumane. Long before the outrage became so loud and international, I personally begged the Governor of Wakayama Prefecture to do something about it. Obviously he didn't.

This hunt is not about preserving culture, and it is unusually cruel, even for marine mammal hunts. If it is not stopped or if methods are not improved, the protest will crescendo, not go away. As a Japanese citizen, one sympathetic to whaling cultures such as the Inuit and the people of Taiji, I am can only feel sad and helpless. I am very glad to have been able to take part in this symposium with its open and frank debate, and especially glad to have been able to talk with Arne Bjørge, who has seen the Taiji dolphin kill more recently than I. He also described the kill as a kind of “chaos” - his words - but he did assert that the Taiji hunters were making efforts towards a quicker kill of the animals they caught.

With regards to Japan's research whaling in the Antarctic I have tried to be supportive. I have seen for myself the large numbers of minke whales in those waters. I have seen that

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some very good research has been done (Although few ordinary Japanese have any inkling of just what that research has shown).

However, when Japan announced plans to kill fifty humpback whales, I was aghast. Protest against this, especially from Australia and New Zealand, was bound to be very loud and angry. The humpback, with its easily identifiable tail and flipper patterns and its magnificent jumps and splashes, not to mention the long underwater songs, has become the darling of the whale watching business. To announce a plan to take these humpbacks was bound to cause uproar.

Then film was taken of an adult female minke whale being winched up the slip of the Japanese mother ship alongside a much smaller juvenile whale. That was broadcast in every country that has television. The answer I got about that was that research whaling was supposed to be random, and that the small whale was a juvenile, not a calf. That argument certainly did not wash anywhere else in the world that I know. Pretty well anybody who saw that television footage would say that it was a mother whale and her calf, and feel outraged.

If the nation can afford it, I would like to see Japan continue whale and other research in Antarctic waters, but this should be non-lethal research. As it is, by ignoring international feelings we are only giving ammunition and lucrative market place for organizations such as Sea Shepherd.

I personally feel very strongly that if Japan is to continue whaling it should be by small-scale coastal whaling, from traditional whaling ports such as Taiji. Each hunt should have an observer aboard, preferably an international observer, and quotas should be scientifically decided and strictly monitored. The killing of the whales must be as humane as possible.

We in Japan must not isolate ourselves and dismiss how others feel. We cannot just claim that this is our culture and that we are being misunderstood. I urge Japan to take leadership in research and responsible management for wise use and sustainability in all marine resources. If we don't, we will not only lose friends, we will lose the future.

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