

My own view is that meeting the needs of mammals simply requires a new approach.

*Trevor B Poole*  
*UFAW*  
*Potters Bar*

#### Commercial killing of cetaceans

Sir, Might I respond to the suggestion in the Reports and comments section (*Animal Welfare 1992, 1: 224-225*) that the recent findings of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) study of commercial killing methods should be of interest.

At the 1991 meeting of the IWC it was agreed, after heavy objections, that a workshop on the methods of killing whales be held prior to the 1992 meeting to consider the methods used and evaluate the progress made since the previous workshop held in 1980.

This 1992 workshop took place in Glasgow on 20-22 June and was attended by one delegate from Australia, six from Denmark, three from Iceland, nine from Japan, two from New Zealand, six from Norway, four from UK, five from USA and one invited expert, together with a number of observers. It is worth noting that in spite of agreement at the planning meeting that the deadline for submission of papers for this meeting was to be 20 May 1992, so that all the participants had sufficient time to study the documents, only UK met the deadline. All other papers were not available until immediately before the meeting.

Some whalers objected to the papers that clearly showed the cruelty of the

ways of killing and argued that the methods were humane, although their own records clearly indicated that approximately half the whales killed did not die in a minute or less. They quoted the average time to death, when the important point is the number that did not die instantaneously or within seconds of being struck by a harpoon. In fact approximately half of the whales took up to 10, 15 or 20 minutes to die - some took even longer. It is also clear that whales, like other mammals, are not rendered unconscious by a blast unless the explosion is very close to the brain and is of sufficient power to shake the brain within the skull or damage it with shrapnel.

It was also admitted by whalers that the main problem is aiming the harpoon so that it damages the brain or explodes within the upper thorax. Even a strike directly in the thorax may not cause instantaneous unconsciousness because of the whale's ability to cope with lack of oxygen. The whale's brain is surrounded by a plexus of veins which can supply oxygen for minutes after the blood supply from the heart is cut off. The main supply of blood to the whale's brain is not the carotid arteries as in land mammals, but via vessels in the spinal cord.

Japanese whalers, in many cases where the harpoon does not kill the animal, pull the whale alongside the ship and insert two electrodes near the heart to induce death by passing a current to arrest cardiac function. However, their own records show that the current has to be kept on for three to four minutes and even then, in some cases, the heart does

not stop and the current must be re-applied. This can cause a great deal of unnecessary suffering because the electric current may cause spasms of the muscles resembling cramp. It was pointed out at the meeting that a second explosive harpoon could be aimed accurately at such close range and that the use of electricity should be discontinued.

Evidence was presented of the stress caused by the drive-method of killing particularly when the animal reaches the beach. This method of killing is practised in the Faroe Islands and in some coastal areas of Japan.

There was general agreement that rifles should not be used as a primary means of killing. In Greenland, for example, some whales are hit by hundreds of bullets before dying and even then some escape with bullets in them. This was confirmed by a Danish scientist, Dr Larsen, who has performed post-mortems on harpooned whales and found many bullets buried in their bodies from previous attempts to kill them.

Much of the killing by Aboriginal methods causes a great deal of suffering - Belugas, Narwhals and Harbour Porpoises in Greenland; Black Sea dolphins in Turkey; Dall's Porpoises and Short Finned Pilot Whales in Japan to name a few.

At the IWC meeting a lengthy two-page resolution on humane killing which had been worded in the least controversial way to suit this international forum was adopted by consensus. It urged all members of the IWC to continue to promote the

development of humane killing methods; to gather together information on all aspects of killing whales, and to consider holding further workshops. The resolution was proposed by Australia, Brazil, France, Germany, Ireland, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, UK and USA.

Clearly all methods presently used to kill whales are unacceptably cruel.

*Bill Jordan*

*Chairman - Care for the Wild,  
Rusper, West Sussex*