

# Whaling—almost a Victory

*Richard Fitter*

The whale has become a symbol of world concern for the preservation of wildlife, concern mostly by people who have not the faintest idea that there is more than one kind of whale, and who do not care about these distinctions anyway. So on the opening day of this year's International Whaling Commission meeting, June 25th, in London, readers of *The Times* were greeted with a half-page advertisement illustrated with a vertical picture of the blue whale, and titled 'One is killed every 20 minutes. Is this carnage really necessary?'. The ensuing appeal for the implementation of the Stockholm Conference's call for a ten-year moratorium on commercial whaling was signed by twenty distinguished conservationists, headed by TRH Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands and the Duke of Edinburgh, and nine conservation bodies, including the Fauna Preservation Society, which contributed £200 towards the cost. The FPS Chairman, Sir Peter Scott, and two Vice-Presidents, Sir Frank Fraser Darling and Sir Julian Huxley, were among the individual signatories, who also included the President and Director-General of IUCN, Commander Jacques Cousteau, Professors Jean Dorst and René Dubos, Dr Paul Ehrlich, Dr Thor Heyerdahl, Dr Konrad Lorenz, Dr Sicco Mansholt, and the Chairman of the Trustees of the British Museum (Natural History), Dr J. E. Smith.

Although the Scientific Committee of the IWC predictably declared that there was no biological requirement or biological justification for a moratorium on whaling, a judgment which would be disputed by many biologists without the tunnel vision of the whaling specialists, the Technical Committee of the IWC proceeded to vote in favour of it. However decisions of the International Whaling Commission require a three-quarters majority, and the progressive decision of the Technical Committee was not upheld by a sufficient majority of the main Commission. One is left with the feeling that one more heave will achieve the objective almost unanimously voted by the nations assembled at Stockholm. If all the nations who voted for the moratorium had used their votes in the same sense at the two subsequent IWC meetings, the moratorium would now be in force.

The Commission set the catch limits for the 1973/74 season as set out in the table opposite.

Attached to the fin whale quota is the important proviso that the taking of fin whales shall cease at the end of the June 1976 season. It remains to be seen whether the two remaining nations which operate pelagic whaling fleets, Japan and Russia, will denounce this decision under the 90-day rule, the existence of which is one of the reasons why the IWC is such a weak and ineffective conservation instrument. Another important advance is the Commission's acceptance of its own scientists' advice not only to abolish the blue whale unit but to fix catch limits by stock units. It is claimed that the fin whale quota

### Catch Limits

Region	Species	1973/74 Quota	1972/73 Quota	1972/73 Catch
Antarctic	Fin	1450	1950	1761
	Sei & Bryde's	4500	5000	3864
	Minke	5000	5000	5745
N Pacific	Fin	550	figures not given separately	
	Sei & Bryde's	3000		
	Sperm	6000 male 4000 female		
S Hemisphere	Sperm	8000 male 5000 female		

will continue the process of restoring the stock, but for each of the other species the quota is at or below the replacement yield.

### FPS Policy on Whaling

This statement was read by the Hon. Secretary, the FPS's official observer at the International Whaling Commission's meetings in June, on the first day of the meetings:

The Fauna Preservation Society continues to support the proposed ten-year moratorium on whaling with, of course, the proviso that small communities, as in the Azores and Greenland, should continue to be allowed to catch whales for their own consumption. The Society feels in particular that a great deal more research is necessary before the present whaling statistics can form a safe basis for continued cropping of whales. Our criticism is not directed towards the statistical analysis so ably carried out by the Commission's Scientific Committee, but towards the basic data. These are widely accepted to be inadequate, and even the Scientific Committee itself could not reasonably claim more than that they do the best they can with the information available.

The Society would like to see very much more research on whale populations and whale behaviour carried out as an end in itself and not mostly as a by-product of observations which happen to be made in the course of commercial whaling. To give one instance only, the fact that whaling fleets are in certain parts of the ocean only at certain times of the year and never at other times of the year inevitably gives a bias to the figures. Other industries carry out basic pure research of this kind and there seems no reason why the whaling industry should not re-establish its right to crop whales on the basis of firmly based data. The Society would also wish to see a great deal more research on living whales, to remedy the present excessive emphasis on data based on whales after their death.

### Antarctic Convention

The Convention on the conservation of Antarctic seals agreed at the conference in London in February 1972, has been signed by all twelve governments. South Africa is so far the only one to ratify, but it is hoped to have the necessary seven ratifications (including the British) to bring it into force by the end of the year.