



A WHALE-CHASING SHIP hauls two whales back to its mother ship to be butchered in the seas off Norway. dpa PHOTO

Norwegians face dilemma over whaling and ethics

By HELGE OEGRIM

OSLO (dpa) Norway's fishermen will soon be allowed to hunt whales again, as the numbers of one species have stabilized during a six-year ban. Now environmentalists in Norway are caught between national feeling and the international conservation movement.

Whaling has a long tradition in Norway and almost no one in the country supports "ethical" arguments against the killing of the mammals.

At the same time however, the Norwegian sections of international environmental organizations like Greenpeace and the World Wide Fund for Nature are coming under strong pressure from members and sympathizers abroad to oppose whaling.

This issue is even more fraught than one might think, because it could affect the Nordic environmentalists' access to the foreign funds that are administered by their headquarters abroad.

One spokesman said that differing points of view were to be expected in such large organizations. "The others listen to us, but whether we can convince them is another matter," Thor-Ivar Guldberg of WWF Norway pointed out diplomatically.

An example of the conflict within such organizations is that while the German branch of WWF collected 150,000 signatures for a petition against any kind of whaling by Norway, WWF Norway agreed — hesitantly and conditionally — to the hunting of minke whales.

However, the Norwegian branch of the charity does not agree with the Oslo government's intention of leaving the International Whaling Commission if it goes against the recommendations of its own experts and fails to allow the hunting of minke whales soon.

Of the big environmental organizations, only Greenpeace remains firmly opposed to whale hunting in any shape or form.

Bellona, the best known environmental organization in Norway, has altered its policy and issued a conditional yes to whaling.

The nature conservancy association has also expressed hesitant approval of whaling, but the decision caused deep divisions within the organization.

The "Nature and Youth" movement unreservedly supports the government stance in favor of commercial whaling and campaigns vociferously abroad against "sentimental wildlife conservationism."

Recently opponents of whaling had some of their fears and arguments confirmed when the Aftenposten newspaper published a report on the methods used to kill minke whales hunted for "scientific research."

This showed that only half the 95 whales killed died as soon as they were struck by a harpoon. Forty-two percent fought death for up to 10 minutes and 8 percent struggled even longer. In one case it took a whale 31 minutes to die.