

IRISH WHALE AND DOLPHIN GROUP

NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 1991



IRELAND - EUROPE'S FIRST WHALE SANCTUARY

Only three months after the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group proposal, An Taoiseach, Charles Haughey declared Irish territorial waters a whale and dolphin sanctuary. This is an unprecedented step within Europe and has many important implications for the global conservation of whales and dolphins. The first official whale sanctuary was declared in 1913 in Western Australia as a method of conserving stocks for commercial exploitation. Since the successful establishment of the Indian Ocean Whale sanctuary in 1979, sanctuary areas have been declared off the coasts of Mexico, U.S.A., Ecuador, Dominican Republic and Canada. However the Irish declaration has set a precedence as it incorporates the state's entire exclusive fishery zone. We will have to wait and see if other maritime nations will follow Ireland's example. Here is the full text of the sanctuary declaration from the Department of the Taoiseach, dated 7th June, 1991:

The Taoiseach announced today that the Government have declared all our seas a Whale and Dolphin Sanctuary. This Declaration is in conformity with the Government's Environmental Action Plan Programme and the Dublin Declaration on the Environment which was adopted by the European Council during Ireland's Presidency of the European Community in June, 1990. It is a clear indication of Ireland's commitment to contribute to the preservation and protection of these magnificent creatures in their natural environment, and to do everything possible to ensure that they should not be put in danger of extinction but should be preserved for future generations. Ireland already has a comprehensive legal framework in place - the Whale Fisheries Act, 1937, and the Wildlife Act, 1976 - which empowers the Government to provide this sanctuary. Under this legislation, the hunting of all whale species, including dolphins and porpoises, has been totally banned within the exclusive fishery limits of the State i.e. out to 200 miles from the coast. The Declaration of the Whale and Dolphin Sanctuary within the exclusive fishery limits of the entire country is the first in Europe and will, hopefully, be followed by other maritime nations. The Taoiseach congratulated the recently - established Irish Whale and Dolphin Group for their role in promoting the study and conservation of whales and dolphins in Irish coastal waters.

At the recent meeting of the International Whaling Commission in Iceland, Ireland took the position that the moratorium on commercial whaling in international waters, begun in 1986, should continue. Some 10 years ago

Ireland joined The International Whaling Commission, the aim of which is to provide for the proper conservation of whales throughout the world and for the orderly development of the whaling industry in that context. Ireland's efforts on both the national and international fronts, therefore, have ensured that we are making a significant contribution to the world wide conservation of whales and dolphins.

Reactions to the Whale Sanctuary declaration

"We are now waking up to the richness of the warm-blooded life around our shores"

- Michael Viney.

"It is a very welcome move to protect the whales and dolphins, but the Irish fishing fleet also needs protection"

- Mary O'Donnell, Green Party

"While welcoming the principle of establishing such a sanctuary, failure to consult with representatives of the fishing industry was 'irresponsible' and 'high-handed' and can only be described as 'the thin end of the wedge'"

- Joey Murrin, chief executive, Killybegs Fishermen's Organisation.

"Did Fungi have something to do with it?"

- Tom MacSweeney, Marine Times.

"We need concrete enforcement measures to make sure the navy is given the directive to use the power it has and for it not to turn a blind eye to whaling activities"

- Jeremy Wates, Co-ordinator of Earthwatch.

"There is understandable anxiety about how such a sanctuary situation might conflict with commercial fishing operations which do not wish to harm these creatures"

- Editorial, Marine Times.

Second Marine Mammal Co-ordinating Meeting

London Zoo, 19th June, 1991

The IWDG were invited to send a representative to the second marine mammal co-ordinating meeting, organised by the Department of the Environment in the U.K. The meeting was held at London Zoo and participants discussed the research programmes currently underway in the U.K. on marine mammals in an effort to facilitate communication between different research institutes and interests.

The main work at present is to conduct full post-mortems on small cetaceans washed up or incidentally caught in nets (by-caught) and landed by fishermen, in an attempt to assess their health status in U.K. waters.

Tissue samples are being taken for toxicological analysis and the diet, age, reproductive condition and parasite load of each animal is also being studied. Since September, 1990, 33 cetaceans (22 harbour porpoise, 15 common dolphins, 2 pilot whales, 2 white-sided dolphins, 2 striped dolphins) and 10 seals (9 grey seals, 1 common seal) have undergone post-mortem examination. No by-caught animals have yet been obtained. Preliminary results show that most animals had pneumonic lesions of bacterial origin and stomach ulcers. Lung and stomach worms were also frequently recorded.

An analysis of stranding records shows an increase had occurred since the 1960's on U.K. coasts (similar trend in Ireland - see last newsletter). There have been six live strandings in the previous eight months. About eighty animals have been analysed for toxics and it is hoped that these results will be correlated with the post-mortem results.

The meeting heard that the cetacean sighting scheme has been updated and all records will soon be on a P.C. using a customised programme for rapid analysis. Photo I.D. and training packs were being produced for regional groups.



Drs. Simon Berrow and Don Cotton attended on behalf of the group and outlined the current status of marine mammal research in Ireland, including the formation of the IWDG.

Simon Berrow

WELFARE COMMITTEE

The IWDG has established a committee to formulate guide-lines for the welfare of whales and dolphins stranded alive. General policy would be one of positive interference or non-interference. The committee intend to present draft guide-lines to the IWDG at the November meeting (see details elsewhere) for discussion. These guide-lines will eventually be presented to the International Whaling Commission's welfare working group. The committee is planning a meeting in mid-October and are contacting relevant organisations and individuals, both in Ireland and abroad, for information and opinions. Anybody who would like to attend the meeting or express their opinions on this subject should contact:

Brendan Price, 'Clochan', Tobergregan, Garristown, Co. Dublin (01) 354370, enclosing a S.A.E.





FIRST AID FOR STRANDED CETACEANS

RSPCA, Causeway, Horsham, West Sussex RH12 1HG.
Tel: Horsham (0403) 64181

Scottish SPCA, 19 Melville Street, Edinburgh EH3 7PL.
Tel: Edinburgh (031) 225 6418

First Aid For Stranded Cetaceans

The above booklet is available for £2 (inc. P&P) from the IWDG, c/o Emer Rogan, Zoology Dept., UCC, Cork.

The history of whale sanctuaries

The original whale sanctuaries were used as a management tool for the conservation of whale stocks for commercial exploitation. The first official sanctuary was declared by the authorities in Western Australia in 1913. They banned whaling in waters eastward from Norwegian Bay, where female Humpback whales were thought to give birth. However, this did not prevent whaling companies from applying for licences to whale within the sanctuary and, inevitably, conflict ensued between the Federal and State authorities which led to the establishment of a commission of enquiry. The outcome of the enquiry was largely academic as whaling companies realised their exclusive hunting of Humpback whales, especially mothers with calves, had no long-term future and so they withdrew in 1928.

The Antarctic oceans had been divided into six areas for the management of pelagic or off-shore whaling. In 1938, it was agreed by all whaling nations, to ban the catching of whales in the waters between South Shetland and the eastern borders of the Ross Sea (Areas I and VI). This area had been an unofficial sanctuary since at least 1929 and there was no difficulty in reaching an agreement as very few whales were found in this area and no expedition would consider hunting there. A ban on pelagic whaling was also adopted for the Atlantic, and adjacent areas, north of 40° latitude south but, as with the Antarctic sanctuary, it was easy to agree on a ban of this kind as pelagic whaling in these waters had never been successful.

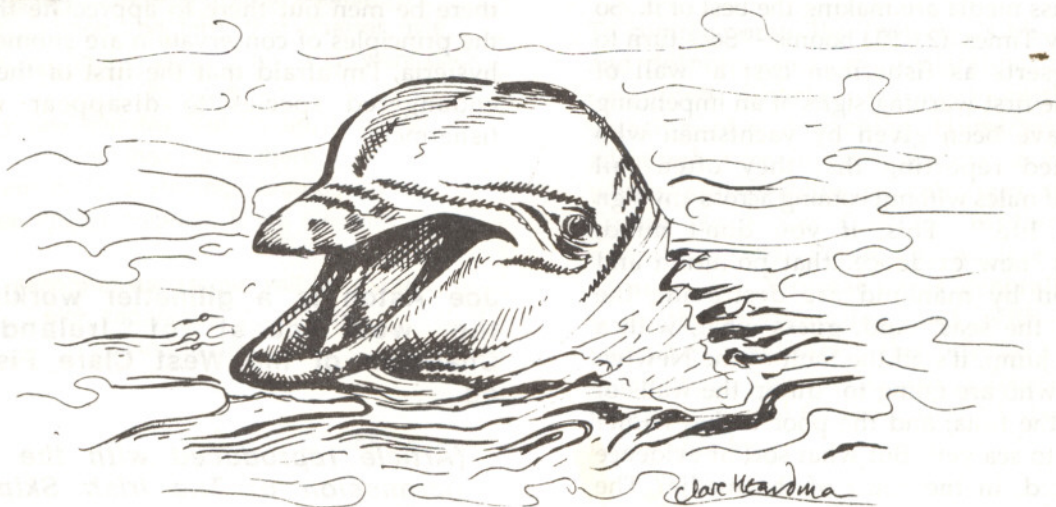
Areas I and VI of the Antarctic Ocean were re-opened in 1955 and 25% of the seasons total catch was caught in this area. Attempts were made by the International Whaling Commission's Scientific Committee to reinstate the sanctuary area but it was sacrificed to the whaling industry in the hope that this would ease pressure on whale stocks in other sectors. It didn't and Antarctic stocks continued to decline.

In 1979, a ten million square kilometre sanctuary was set up in the Indian Ocean (including the Arabian and Red Seas) on the recommendation of the tiny island of the Seychelles. This served to protect one important breeding ground for the Sperm whale, which is now in an apparently good state and is now considered to be the most important breeding groups for this species.

Since the success of the Indian Ocean Whale Sanctuary, sanctuaries have been set up, or proposed, in Baja California (Mexico), Glacier Bay, Alaska and Stellwagen Bank off Cape Cod (U.S.A.), the Hawaiian Islands, Silver Bank (Dominica Republic), Gulf of St. Lawrence (Canada), the territorial waters around Ecuador in South America, the Madieran Islands off northwest Africa and now Ireland!

Most of these recent sanctuaries have been established because whales have been recognised for their non-consumptive values and whale-watching has become of some economic importance in many of these countries.

Simon Berrow



Doubtful motives spark media's dolphin campaign

A fisherman's perspective on the issues surrounding dolphins:

Out on the grey seas of a bad summer, a fisherman's heart will always be lifted by the sight of a school of dolphins skipping down the waves to meet him. Nobody could fail to delight in their graceful, effortless diving, twisting, leaping; one moment just glimpsed as a presence beneath the waves, then suddenly, briefly, in the air right before our eyes.

Fishing off the west coast this time of year, we see then every day, and regret the fact that, in the course of hauling many miles of net each year, we might unfortunately kill some. It is something that we would do everything practical to avoid, but one accepts as part of the battle that is life. Far worse things also happen - boats are lost, friends are sometimes drowned. Nature as we witness it daily in the sea is often violent and cruel, and in hardship and danger we have to earn our living.

FREEDOM SYMBOL

There are a great many people in the modern world who like to think that they have put this primitive attitude to life behind them. They can afford to take a full belly for granted, and money is something to be wheeled, cajoled, bamboozled or otherwise manipulated or screwed out of other people, rather than something that is earned in return for production. This leaves them somewhat at a loss, and it happens that the dolphin has become a kind of talisman, a symbol of the grace and freedom they have lost, along with the hardship of winning a living from nature. It fits in neatly with 'the end is nigh' syndrome, 1990's style; and the mass media are making the best of it. So the 'Sunday Times' (2.6.91) booms - "Seas turn to marine deserts as fishermen cast a 'wall of death' ...The first warning signs of an impending disaster have been given by yachtsmen who have started reporting that they often sail hundreds of miles without coming across any sign of animal life." This, if you don't mind, constitutes "new evidence...that pollution and exploitation by mankind are destroying the ecology of the seas" And, guess what, with a skip and a jump, it's all the fault of the Newlyn fishermen who are going to "dump the walls of death" on the tuna; and the poor blokes hadn't even gone to sea yet! But what sort of evidence do you need, in the court of the media? The

'Evening Press' on 30th May excelled itself with a big picture of what looks like Fungi jumping over a rope, with hills in the background that are certainly a long way from the tuna grounds, and the heading "Safety jump for Dolphin". Evidently the dolphin is supposed to be leaping for its life and, we read on, "A wall of death fishing net being used off the west of Ireland to catch tuna, will wipe out whales and dolphins in the area..."

So, along with our old friends, bad weather, bad fishing, breakdowns and cussed boats, fishermen find themselves with a new enemy to contend with, fighting for their very right to exist, with the mass media coming down on them like a ton of bricks. The result for the Newlyn men - endless hassle, bad 'phone calls even to the extent of a death threat, and possibly the loss of a very promising fishery, which if it isn't banned is liable to being restricted to the point of non-viability.

The worst of the whole thing is, that if conservationists allow themselves to be taken over by media freaks and thrill seekers, and the fishermen have to put up with this kind of nonsense, there can be small hope of them working together constructively, for which I for one consider that they urgently need to do. We need sober and well balanced conservationists. In the case of this tuna fishery off Ireland, there doesn't seem to be a real problem. It seems that if the back rope of the net is submerged, and the nets hung from buoys as the herring nets used to be, the dolphins very rarely fail to detect it. What is needed is not media hysteria, but research into what materials and methods work best to reflect the dolphins' sonar; on which subject, I was intrigued to discover that my newly installed Furuno sonar picks up their signals very clearly, showing them like interference from other boats' sonar. Long may they continue to grace our seas, and long may there be men out there to appreciate them. If the principles of conservation are submerged in hysteria, I'm afraid that the first of the highly endangered species to disappear will be fishermen.

Joe Aston is a gillnetter working off the west coast of Ireland and Chairman of the West Clare Fish Co-op.

(Article reproduced with the kind permission of The Irish Skipper)

I Pick Asparagus to Dolphins

I pick asparagus to Dolphins,
let me tell you why:

The smallest pasture of the townland, Synge,
One little tenth of an acre, overlooks Cape Clear
South Harbour, Ireland,
due south on out to sea.

Were I ever to build a hunkered-down house,
for us,
I'd place it beside Synge.
picture it perfectly related to the sea

Any tourist with a camera up our road
stops there -- and clicks,
and I click too,
the F-stop of my eye ever ready
for my hearts film.

Were it developed at my death
you'd find a leitmotif of harbour view,
and you.

I pick asparagus to dolphins,
let me tell you why:

Seven trenches dug, I parked the tractor beside
Synge's west wall
and forked over fork on fork of humus-black
rotted goat manure, and some two tons' worth.
Packing the clingy, worm-rich dung,
pulling in the earth,
mounding it,
spread-eagling the asparagus crowns out
over each of the forty-nine mounds,
covering the stringy roots.

I was half-way through before I took a break.
There, where the inner harbour widens suddenly
between Black Point and Spanish Smugglers
cave,

I zoomed in on a herd of dolphins
frolicking back and forth that quarter mile.
After half an hour, I capped my lens, went back
to work
every few minutes looking up, focusing,
and they were there,
rhythmically surfacing, arcing, diving
down, ten fifteen dolphins filling me with peace.

This year that asparagus will be mature.

I pick asparagus to dolphins,
and to you.

Chuck Kruger

"The Dolphin's Gift"

The proceeds from the premiere of a new film starring Fungi, the Dingle Dolphin, were donated to the IWDG recently. The film, directed by Kim Kindersley and produced by Victoria Cotton (no relation of Don's) celebrated the feeling of swimming with a wild dolphin. Cian de Buitlear's excellent photography certainly made everyone lean backwards as Fungi leapt from the screen. The IWDG is very grateful for the generous donation and wish the film every success when it is shown throughout the world.



HUMP FOR HAUGHEY

To commemorate the Taoiseach's historic whale and dolphin sanctuary declaration, the IWDG presented Charles Haughey with an oil painting of a breaching Humpback Whale. Although rare in Irish waters, a Humpback whale, and perhaps its calf, was sighted off Galley Head, Co. Cork by birdwatchers as recently as 1989. Painted by wildlife artist **Don Conroy**, the Taoiseach was generally thrilled with the presentation and with the very positive feedback the declaration has generated. The IWDG are indebted to **Don Conroy** not only for the painting but also for the new IWDG logo

NEXT IWDG MEETING

The next national meeting of the IWDG is to be held at Sligo R.T.C. on November 9th, 1991. If anybody would like to include something on the agenda or would like further details, including the agenda, contact Dr. Don Cotton, Environmental Sciences, Sligo R.T.C., Sligo. (071) 43261 (W) (071) 43271 (H), but please enclose a S.A.E.

IWDG Finances

It is hoped that the group will continue to produce this newsletter for nothing in order to keep as many people involved in its' activities as possible. Postage is the biggest cost incurred in its production. Future newsletter mailings will have to be restricted only to those people who either send a stamped addressed envelope (you may send a few at a time) or a donation to cover costs. Please send SAEs to Dr. Simon Berrow, Department of Zoology, University College, Cork. Any donations please send to Dr. Emer Rogan, Treasurer, IWDG, Department of Zoology, University College, Cork.

Whale Sanctuary T-shirts!!

To commemorate An Taoiseach's historic declaration (see front page), the IWDG are producing a special whale sanctuary tee-shirt. Designed by Pinpoint Design Ltd., Dublin, a whale and four dolphins are happily swimming in a turquoise sea. Advanced orders can be made, price £10.00 (including P&P), all profits going to the IWDG. The IWDG are very grateful to Bob Oakley for the design and Stephen Franck for organising everything. Please send orders to Dr. Emer Rogan, Zoology Dept., U.C.C.

Connemara Sea Week

Whales and dolphins are to feature greatly in this years Connemara Sea Week. Organised annually by Leo Hallisey, the holiday weekend (26th-28th October) is to feature talks and activities involving whales and dolphins. A wide range of events including poetry, art and traditional music sessions have been arranged. Kieran Mullvaney of Greenpeace International and Dr. Peter Evans of Oxford University, amongst others, are giving illustrated talks on whales and dolphins. Further details including a full agenda can be obtained from:

Leo Hallisey, Renvyle, Letterfrack, Co. Galway (095) 43443

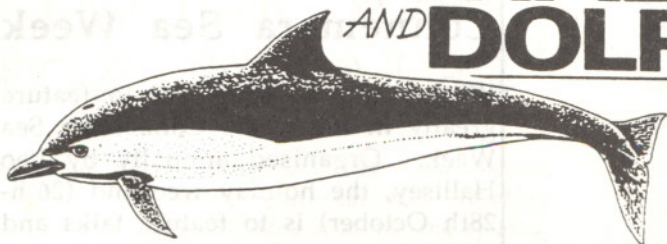
ARTICLES & LETTERS..

If anybody has an opinion or something of interest they would like to contribute to the IWDG newsletter, then please send them to Dr. Simon Berrow, Department of Zoology, University College, Cork.



THE IRISH

WHALE AND DOLPHIN GROUP



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