

New Video Footage Demonstrates Horrific Cruelty Of Japanese Scientific Whaling



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Figure 1. Japanese whaling in the Antarctic. A whale harpooned near the tail is winched tight to the bow of a catcher vessel. It is unable to get its head above water to breathe but continues to struggle vigorously for 35 minutes despite its injuries.

Key findings from the analysis of new whaling footage

- Whaling often starts with a high speed chase so the stress for the whale begins some time before it is even harpooned
- Fewer than one in five of the observed whales was killed instantaneously. Average time to death for whales not killed instantly was 10 minutes. One whale survived for at least 35 minutes
- Some whales simply suffocate as a result of being unable to raise their heads out of the water.
- The killing of larger whales (fin, sei, Bryde's and sperm) is likely to be even more cruel, due to their larger size.
- An example was observed where a struggling whale was lashed to side of the catcher ship, which then steamed off.
- Hitting a whale at sea in rough weather from a pitching vessel is just as hard as it was in the 1950s when animal welfare concerns were first raised in the IWC.
- Despite many failed attempts, no humane way has been found to reliably kill whales, so that whaling remains incurably inhumane.

Video Evidence Underlines Cruelty of Whaling

No one can doubt that whaling causes great suffering to whales but the how bad is it? Japan releases very little information regarding the animal welfare implications of its whaling in the Southern Ocean and the North Pacific and it is difficult to relate to bland statistics of times to death for an activity that usually occurs without witness on the open ocean. Video footage of whaling is rare and so the footage obtained by Greenpeace of Japanese whaling in the Southern Ocean in 2005/06 offers an unprecedented insight into what really happens when a whale is harpooned. The footage appears to show business as usual for the Japanese whaling fleet with detailed analysis showing no evidence that the presence of Greenpeace reduced the

accuracy of the harpoon shots or prolonged the death of any whale once it had been harpooned.

Unedited raw video footage was analysed by a team of scientistsⁱ. The paper submitted to the IWC's Whale Killing Methods workshop by the Government of Australia examines quantitative data such as the instantaneous death rate, time to death, and location of harpoon impact. In the absence of other information these are the figures that are often discussed at IWC meetings. The overall conclusion was that that killing methods for Antarctic minke whales in JARPA II are inefficient and raise serious welfare issues concerning low instantaneous death rates, protracted times to death and the occurrence of asphyxiation as a secondary killing method. Fewer than one in five of the filmed whales were estimated to have died instantaneously and the remaining whales took an average of 10 minutes to be killed. The longest time to death from being first injured by a harpoon was 35 minutes.

However, the footage also tells its own story. On one occasion the whale was hit in the abdomen and the intestines were hauled out of the still living animal as the harpoon line was winched tight under the bow of the ship. This was described by a veterinarian as like having abdominal surgery without anaesthetic. And, incredibly while being filmed, one whale was lashed to the side of the catcher ship by its tail with its head therefore forced underwater, still obviously alive. The catcher ship was then seen accelerating in speed. There appeared to be no attempt to put the whale out of its misery and it is likely that this animal slowly died by asphyxiation. The hunting practise used by the Japanese fleet which involves winching whales tight to the bow on the harpoon line seems likely to result in a substantial proportion of whales dying of asphyxiation. This is because nearly half of the whales observed were harpooned in the rear portion of the body and once winched tight on the harpoon line, could not get their head above water to breathe. In these situations it is also not possible to get a clear shot at the brain with a rifle. High powered rifles are used for what is commonly referred to as a secondary killing method for the mar which, with an accurate shot, can be an effective secondary killing method.

In conclusion, just watching the footage of the 2005/06 hunt clearly shows the immense suffering involved. The detailed analysis further confirms that despite horrific injuries a substantial proportion of whales nevertheless likely die of asphyxiation. The fact that despite claiming to be conducting whaling for scientific purposes, the Government of Japan has consistently chosen not to provide key information (data and video footage) can only be interpreted as a tacit acknowledgement of the cruelty of its whaling.

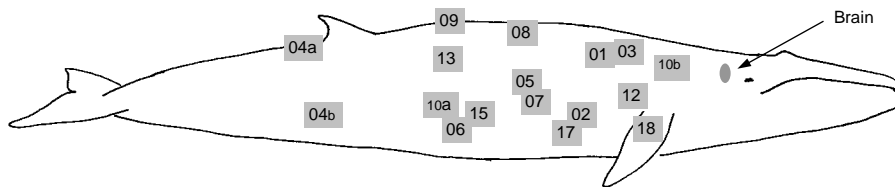


Figure 2. Locations of the harpoon hits analysed from the video taken by Greenpeace. Nearly half of the hits were aft of the midpoint of the whale such that when the harpoon line is winched tight the whale cannot get its head above water. Only harpoons which hit the animal on its underside and close to the brain result in a quick death.

ⁱ Leaper, R. Papastavrou, V. and Gales, N. An independent review of the efficacy of killing methods of Antarctic minke whales