

CONVENIENCE KILLS

How SPAR Norway helps prop up Norwegian whaling

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

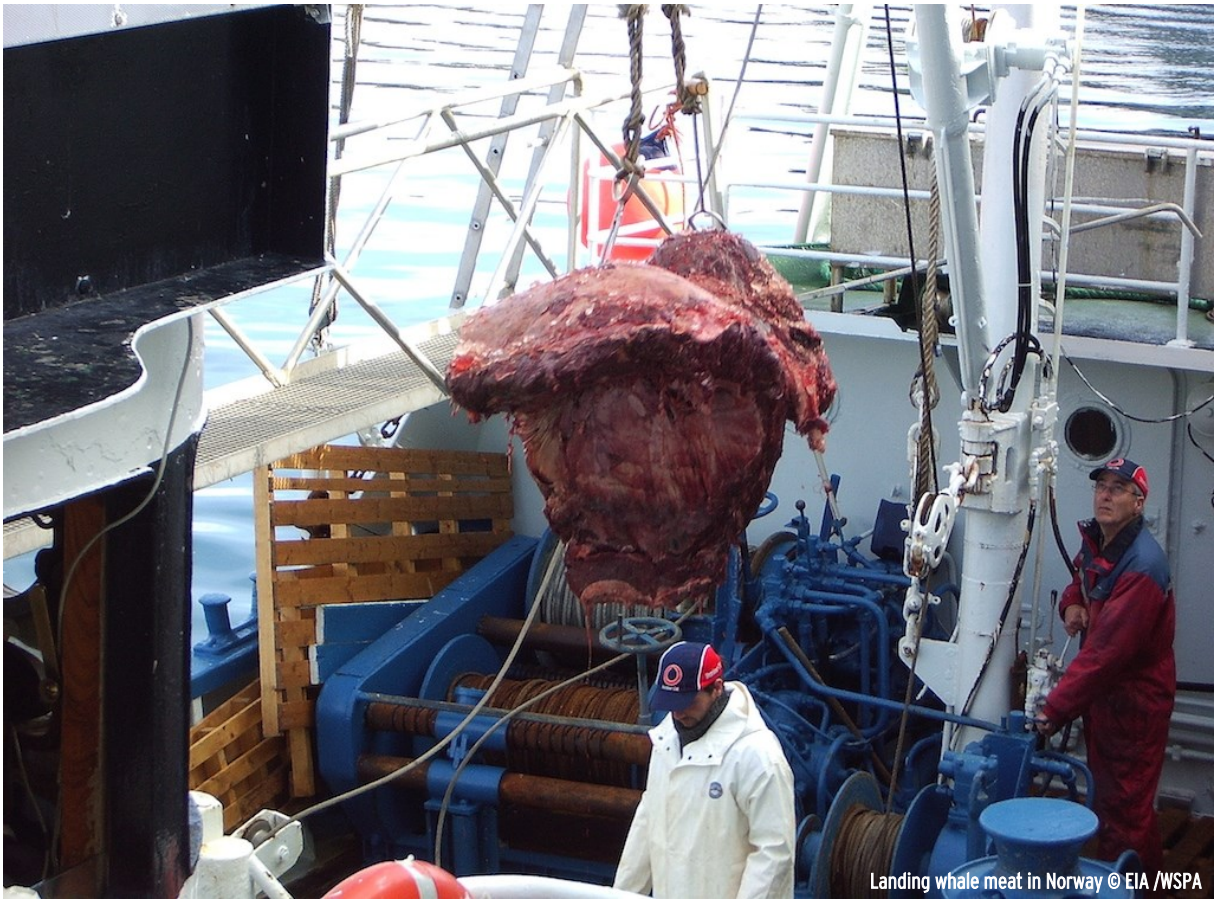
SPAR Norway and its parent company NorgesGruppen ASA are important facilitators of the distribution and sale of whale meat in Norway. Food products from the hunts of protected minke whales killed in Norwegian waters are being sold in a number of SPAR Norway outlets and other NorgesGruppen stores.

Under an objection to the global moratorium on commercial whaling and a reservation to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) ban on international trade in minke whales, Norway is able to legally hunt and trade minke whales. However, Norway's self-allocated whaling quotas are not approved by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and depend upon a calculation method that has been rejected by its Scientific Committee. The IWC has also passed a resolution calling on Norway to halt all whaling activities and refrain from trading.

Ignoring the concerns of both the IWC and CITES, Norway resumed international trade in whale meat in 2002 and has exported more than 107 tonnes of whale products to Iceland, Japan and the Faroe Islands in defiance of the CITES ban. Despite these exports, Norway's whaling industry remains a marginal business. The Norwegian Government and private entities have created several marketing campaigns in an effort to improve domestic whale meat sales to a less-than-enthusiastic public. At the centre of these efforts is SPAR Norway, the country's fourth largest food retailer.

SPAR Norway is part of NorgesGruppen ASA, the market leader in Norway's highly competitive grocery retail and wholesale markets. SPAR International, a multi-billion euro enterprise with more than 12,000 retail stores in 40 countries, granted the license for SPAR in Norway to NorgesGruppen ASA in 1984. There are currently 276 SPAR and EuroSPAR stores in Norway. Investigations in the summer of 2015 revealed that a variety of whale meat products are sold in these stores.

Six conservation organisations are calling on SPAR International to ensure that SPAR Norway and NorgesGruppen ASA stop all sales and distribution of whale meat.



Landing whale meat in Norway © EIA /WSPA

Norwegian whaling in 2015

Norway's whaling has escalated in recent years, with quotas more than doubling from 549 in 2001 to 1,286 today. The number of whaling vessels requesting permits has also increased, to 22 this year.[1] The 2015 minke whale season opened on April 1 and will continue "as long as conditions warrant".[2] As of July 6, a total of 534 whales had been killed.[3]

Historically, most Norwegian whaling boats offloaded whale meat to facilities run by the Norwegian Fishermen's Sales Organisation (Råfisklaget) which sets a minimum price and restricts the volume on the market by requiring whalers to have secured a contract for sale before they land their catch. However, a growing number of whaling vessels avoid the Råfisklaget's restrictions by offloading meat (in whatever quantities they wish) to their own production facilities.[4]

Year	Number of vessels actively whaling	Quota	Catch
2015*	18	1,286	TBA
2014	19	1,286	736
2013	17	1,286	590
2012	18	1,286	465
2011	19	1,286	533
2010	18	1,286	468
2009	21	885	483

** as of June 21, 2015*

One of these facilities is run by Myklebust Hvalprodukter, a whale meat processing and sales company based in northern Norway. Myklebust, which is linked to the whaling vessel *Kato,* is currently the whale meat industry leader in Norway, dominating the marketing and supply to both retail and the hotel, restaurant and catering industries.[5] In January 2014, Myklebust was implicated in the export of whale meat to Germany; the meat was subsequently illegally offered for sale to attendees of a Green Week tourist convention.[6]

Norwegian international trade in whale products

Norway has its sights set firmly on the Japanese market for whale meat, hoping to benefit from a reduction in Japan's commercial whaling in recent years as a result of a legal challenge at the International Court of Justice.

Myklebust dominates Norwegian whale product exports to Japan. Following a small 30kg test run in December 2012, Myklebust has exported nearly 90 tonnes of whale products to the Toshi International company of Shizuoka, Japan.[7] Myklebust, along with other whale meat processors such as Hopen Fisk AS, Gunnar Klo AS and Br. Astrup Andreassen AS, is a member of a Råfisklaget working group dedicated to the promotion of minke whale meat trade with Japan.[8]

Norwegian whalers also see potential in the smaller Icelandic market and to working with Icelandic whalers. In

addition to at least two exports (totaling almost five tonnes)[9] of minke whale meat to Iceland, the Norwegian whaling company, Lofothval, which is partially owned by Icelandic whaling kingpin Kristján Loftsson, has also imported almost 15 tonnes of whale products from Iceland and then re-exported some of the Icelandic products along with Norwegian whale meat to Japan's whaling company, Kyodo Senpaku.[10, 11, 12] Lofothval has also exported 21 shipments of whale meat to the Faroe Islands since 2002, totaling more than 13 tonnes.[13]

In 2014, the United Nations' World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP WCMC) expressed concern at the escalating trade in whale products under reservation.[14] In addition, investigations by the Animal Welfare Institute (AWI) and Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) recently revealed that the Japanese Ministry of Health mandated the disposal of several shipments of Norwegian whale products due to high levels of the pesticides aldrin and dieldrin, in excess of Japanese human health standards.[15]

Year	Month	Amount in kg
2014	October	48,113
2014	January	34,281
2013	December	3,086
2013	February	4,251
2008	May	5,195

Norwegian exports of whale meat to Japan 2008-15

SPAR Norway, NorgesGruppen and the promotion of whale products

In addition to encouraging whale meat exports, the Norwegian Government (along with Innovation Norway and Råfisklaget[16]) funds marketing and branding campaigns to promote domestic whale meat cuisine, including in the hotel, restaurant and catering sector. A new marketing association established in 2012 has focused on improving the packaging of whale meat, creating a wider array of whale products and more professional-looking advertising of whale meat.[17]

Myklebust has collaborated since 2012 with NorgesGruppen, Norway's largest wholesaler and retail grocer supplier, to develop a "quality whale meat from the Norwegian Sea" concept, including the logo below.[18]



Among the NorgesGruppen supermarket chains known to offer whale meat are SPAR/EuroSPAR, Meny and Kiwi[19], as well as Asko, Norway's largest wholesaler which delivers supplies to all the NorgesGruppen supermarkets, including SPAR.[20] Another subsidiary of the NorgesGruppen, Unil, which develops products for the company's private labels, also sells whale meat to the food service sector (service stations, kiosks, fast food outlets, restaurants, canteens and hotels) as well as hospitals, prisons and other public institutions. It also sells whale meat online.[21]



Whale products on sale in SPAR, Bergen © paulthompson.info

Research on the ground in Norway, as well as online, has shown that whale meat is widely available throughout the SPAR/EuroSPAR chains, especially in northern Norway. Investigators documented whale meat sales in both SPAR and EuroSPAR stores in Bergen, and SPAR shops in Bodo and Liland. Prices ranged from 64.90kr/kg (€7.35 / US$8.16 / £5.22) for whale meat "strips" and 89.90kr/kg (€10.18 / US$11.30 / £7.24) for packaged fillets of whale beef to 99kr/kg (€11.21 / US$12.44 / £7.96) for fresh whale meat at the butchery counter.

Online references to sales of whale products were also found for SPAR/EuroSPAR stores in Tromsø, Svolvær and Kristiansund. Products from the Myklebust, Lofothval and Hopmark whale processing companies were featured, including a smoked whale "ham" product.

Hunting methods and welfare concerns

All whaling is inherently cruel and even the most advanced whaling methods cannot render a whale insensitive to pain prior to slaughter, as is the norm for domestic food animals. Modern Norwegian whaling involves the use of harpoons fired into swimming whales from moving platforms on a shifting sea, often under challenging weather conditions. The harpoons are fitted with penthrite grenades, which penetrate to about 12 inches and then explode, releasing claw-like protrusions to rip into the flesh. Death may be caused by trauma, laceration or brain wave shock.

In 2005, an undercover investigation by EIA and the World Society for the Protection of Animals (now World Animal Protection) filmed the hunting and harpooning of a minke whale by a Norwegian whaling vessel. A paper submitted to, and discussed at, the IWC 2006 Workshop on Whale Killing Methods and Associated Welfare Issues[22] reported and analysed the sequence of events during the hunt which resulted in an estimated time of death of 14m 30s from the moment the whale was struck by the harpoon to its last visible movement. Norwegian scientists did not challenge the findings of the analysis. The Norwegian Government's official data shows that at least one in five whales do not die immediately and therefore suffer prolonged and agonising deaths.[23]

Conclusion

A coalition of environmental organisations representing hundreds of thousands of citizens in Europe and the USA are calling on SPAR International to use its influence to



persuade NorgesGruppen and SPAR Norway to immediately withdraw from all purchasing, processing, sales and distribution of whale products.

Norway, in defiance of a 30-year-old ban on commercial whaling, continues to expand its whale hunt in an effort to keep its whaling industry afloat in hope the IWC moratorium will be overturned. SPAR Norway and NorgesGruppen play a significant role in the marketing and sale of whale meat and for years have aided the Government of Norway in its efforts to prop up a dying industry by selling and distributing whale meat.

It is clear that SPAR's customer bases outside Norway are overwhelmingly in support of protecting whales; a 2014 poll by ORC International in the UK and Germany found that more than four out of five people would be unlikely to purchase seafood products from companies linked to whaling, including more than half of the respondents who declared themselves very unlikely to do so.[24]

We strongly urge SPAR to help end the slaughter of whales by persuading SPAR Norway and NorgesGruppen to exit the whale meat business permanently.

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