# WHALES versus FISHERIES

"Our analysis clearly shows that there is no evidence that food competition between [marine mammals and fisheries] is a global problem."

(Kristin Kaschner and Daniel Pauly, "Competition between Marine Mammals and Fisheries: Food for Thought")

Supporters of commercial whaling often claim that too many whales are eating too many fish and, therefore, the killing of whales is necessary to preserve fish stocks. This argument clearly ignores the fact that historic industrial whaling reduced many stocks to near extinction and that the number of whales today is a mere fraction of what it was in the 19th century. Pro-whaling nations nevertheless persist in presenting this self-serving argument in numerous international fora. Unfortunately, many countries have accepted this position without deliberation, because it shifts the blame for the decline in fish populations and collapse of fisheries away from the true primary culprit – human activities, such as commercial fishing.

There's no question that many of the world's fish populations are in serious decline. However, human overfishing and fisheries mismanagement have done this damage, not natural predators. Seventy percent of global stocks are being fished at full or over capacity (leading several to collapse). Whales, on the other hand, are a natural part of these complex ecosystems.

Whales and their prey have co-existed for millennia. Depletion of fish stocks did not begin to occur until the human element was added into the equation. The newcomers to the marine ecosystem are the industrial fishing fleets, capable of removing many tons of fish in a single set of a net or long-line. The way to restore any upset in the "balance of nature" is to reduce industrial fishing fleet pressures, not remove natural predators.

Indeed, killing whales to preserve fish would have unknown consequences – and might well further jeopardize fish populations. Killing one predator of a particular prey species may *reduce* that prey species' population, because these predators may also eat *other* predators of that prey species. Removing the predator at the top of the food chain (in this case, the whale) could result in a sharp population increase in the species that was formerly prey to the whale and still is a predator to a particular fish stock. This, in turn, may mean the subsequent decimation of the prey.

Recent modeling indicates that most food consumed by whales consists of prey types that fisheries do not target. Further, whales consume most of their food in areas where humans do not fish. It is the continuation of present fisheries management approaches and the export of fisheries products from developing countries – not whales – that endanger world food security.

While there may be local areas of conflict between marine mammals and fishing vessels, these conflicts can usually be resolved without resorting to killing the marine mammals (through gear modification or acoustic deterrent devices, for example). Broadly culling predators has been discredited by the scientific and progressive management communities – it is not considered an effective way to increase prey populations. Ecosystems and food web interactions are too complex for such simplistic "solutions".

*For more information, contact your local animal welfare organization or marine life protection and preservation society.*