

My name is Louise Mitchell Joseph. I am native of Bequia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines. I speak on behalf of the Eastern Caribbean Coalition of Environmental Awareness, which is represented here by two NGO's from St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

I speak today on the issue of aboriginal whaling in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. In doing so my group wishes to emphasize that in principle we are in support of Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling in circumstances where the subsistence needs are genuine and the whalers are authentic aboriginal peoples. This is not the case in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Aboriginal Whaling

In my capacity as Chairperson of the St. Vincent and the Grenadines National Trust I oversee all archaeological work that is carried out across the country, as well as to facilitate the research and documentation of the true history of our nation.

Never in the history of archeology in St. Vincent and the Grenadines have there been any findings to suggest that the Kalinago or Garifuna peoples, killed whales, interacted with whales, or ate whale meat. The Kalinago and the Garifuna are the aboriginal peoples of our country. Over the last several years there have been many archeological excavations conducted and there was no evidence found whatsoever of whale hunting by aboriginal peoples. Neither whale remains nor weapons that could have been used to kill such a large mammals were ever found. Neither are any images of whales inscribed on our petroglyphs.

The killing of the humpback whales on Bequia is a relic of European and American origin which began in about 1875 by a Scottish settler William Wallace together with his whaling partner a settler of French origin Joseph Ollivierre. It is not an 'aboriginal' activity, it is an activity learnt from the Yankee whalers. Modern day whaling in Bequia is done by persons of mixed European and African descent.

Economic argument

The killing of humpback whales on Bequia cannot be justified on economic grounds or nutritional needs. Alternative sources of protein can be obtained at

cheaper prices on the on the island of Bequia. Those sources including chicken and certain types of fish.

The alleged need for whale meat in SVG statement presented is based on the assumption that all of the 6,000 persons on Bequia actually eat whale meat, which is not the case, especially because much of the meat is taken to the main island of St. Vincent which is not the intended recipient of the quota – the IWC very specifically awards it to meet the needs of the people of Bequia. We must also look at changes in consumption patterns and food preferences over time. The current trend among young people indicates that whale meat is not a desirable option. A recent High School Survey (2011), which included Bequia students, showed that only 39% admitted to have ever eaten whale meat. Also, some persons of certain religions faiths on Bequia do not eat whale meat. It is however considered a delicacy and enjoyed by persons especially in the Paget Farm and La Pompe communities.

The most critical economic argument in relation to whaling activities on Bequia is its negative impact on the tourism industry, which the entire Country is heavily dependent upon, including Bequia. It is the largest industry, the biggest employer and the greatest source of foreign exchange revenue. This has been the case since the collapse of the banana industry after the loss of preferential treatment on the European market. The agricultural sector was further destroyed by Hurricane Tomas in 2010; and soon thereafter was hit by the black Sigatoka and Moka diseases which destroyed most of the bananas in 2011 and 2012. These events have caused SVG to be even more dependent on tourism than ever before. The killing of humpback whales in the heart of the main tourism area, the island of Bequia, is extremely damaging to the tourism industry. It is a practice that we simply cannot afford as a country to continue. The whaling activities of a small community should not be allowed to have such devastating economic impact on the rest of Vincentian society.

Because of the migratory nature of humpback whales, whale hunting in Bequia is important to the economies of other island states such as the Dominican Republic, and Dominica, which rely on increasingly lucrative revenues from whale watching.

Infractions

It is a well known fact that the Bequia whalers have had a long tradition of hunted mothers and calves, contrary to IWC ASW Regulations. Our government has had a history of non compliance with respect to its obligations to the IWC, including absence of adequate measures for the collecting and reporting of data in relation to whaling activities of Bequia. The Government is in a position to collect this data and present in here to the IWC.

There is a misrepresentation in the SVG 2012 statement of needs, which reads “where there is wind the boats use their sails while searching for whales and to pursue them”. This statement omits to mention the key role of speed boats in the hunt, including towing the whale boat to the vicinity of the whale to give the appearance of ASW and to tow the dead whale back to shore. Evidence can be seen in the Animal Welfare Institute Report referred to below. Based on numerous eye witness accounts, speedboats are not only used to herd the whales but also to strike whales, and have become a regular component to the hunting activities in recent years. One such strike and loss, where the whale was harpooned from the speed boat and not the whale boat, occurred this past year just outside Admiralty Bay, a spectacle which was viewed by many.

Whale meat is not only sold on mainland St. Vincent but also in neighbouring Countries and even to the Vincentian diaspora in the United States, and elsewhere.

I wish to also draw your attention the ASW infractions by Whalers on Bequia as set out in the June 2012 Report by the Animal Welfare Institute. Animal welfare interests groups would note that the cold non exploding harpoon is still commonly used, which results in suffering and prolonged death after a whale has been struck.

Conclusion

In conclusion and in light of the lack of genuine subsistence needs, commerciality of the catch, record of infractions, animal cruelty and the fact that the hunters are not aboriginal peoples as the exemption for ASW requires, we call on the IWC to withdraw entirely a proposal for a quota of humpback whales for St. Vincent and the Grenadines to hunt whales under the IWC ASW provision. I urge the IWC not to allow the joint proposal of the Russian Federation, the USA and SVG because the case of SVG is separate and distinct from the other two.

