



Press Release

New Report Debunks Claims of Whale and Dolphin Hunters in Faroe Islands

California/Washington, DC/London/Munich/Zurich, September 25, 2023: Today, in the wake of the latest Faroe Islands drive hunt on Friday that saw the killing of 42 more pilot whales, seven of the world's leading animal welfare and marine conservation organizations released a new report presenting evidence to challenge claims that annual Faroese drive hunts are humane, sustainable, and an integral part of local culture.

This latest hunt brings the total of whales and dolphins killed in the islands to more than 900 - far higher than the usual average of some 685 whales.

The report, *"Unraveling the truth: Whale killing in the Faroe Islands,"* presents evidence-based arguments to take a critical look at the main justifications for the on-going hunting of long-finned pilot whales and other small cetaceans in the Faroe Islands (a small self-governing Danish territory located between Scotland and Iceland in the North Atlantic). The centuries-old hunt, known as the grindadráp, is widely publicized and largely condemned by the international community.

In the period 2010-2020, Faroese whalers have killed an average of 685 pilot whales and 114 dolphins each year, with the meat being distributed among the islands' inhabitants and sometimes sold in grocery stores and restaurants. Prior to this latest hunt, 854 pilot whales had already been killed as of August 2023.¹ More than [1,400 Atlantic white-sided dolphins](#) were killed in a single day in September 2021, sparking widespread public outcry and sharp criticism from the European Union.

When a pod of whales or school of dolphins is spotted, hunters drive them to the shore and into designated killing bays using a line of boats. Once the animals are in shallow water, they are secured using a round-ended hook driven into their blowholes—the whales' breathing passage—and pulled to land. There, every single whale or dolphin is killed with a knife or sharp spinal lance pushed into the neck behind the blowhole. This may paralyse the animal, but it does not necessarily mean that the animal is immediately dead, unconscious or insensible to pain.

"Pods of pilot whales or dolphins cannot be humanely chased to shore, secured and killed. These drive hunts are extremely stress- and painful, the animals are eyewitnesses to the other members of their pod being killed until they themselves meet the same fate." --Dr Sandra Altherr, co-founder of Pro Wildlife, describing the mass slaughter.

"It is very difficult for us to understand why the cruel and unnecessary drive hunts of whales and dolphins in the Faroe Islands still persist. In all other places with a history of such activity, apart from Japan, this inherently inhumane practice has ended. We are deeply concerned about it and hope that this new report will help dispel some of the misunderstanding that exists in the islands and elsewhere." -- Fabienne McLellan, Managing Director of OceanCare.

Among the report's key findings:

- While many the Faroese people may feel traditionally entitled to hunt and eat pilot whales, the new report shows that a majority of Faroese people do not in fact participate in whaling, nor do they consume cetacean products from the hunt. There is also substantial domestic opposition to the hunting of the smaller dolphin species for meat. An April 2022 Gallup poll, for instance, found that 69% of the public was opposed to dolphin hunting, with just 7% expressing strong support.
- Although proponents of pilot whale hunting argue that the capture and killing process is humane, a recent review of Faroese hunting techniques published in *Frontiers in Veterinary Science* concluded that they are ethically and morally unacceptable, given our understanding of the sentient nature of these animals.



- Claims that the drive hunts are sustainable grossly oversimplify a complex issue, and fail to account for the slow reproduction rate of pilot whales and a hunting approach that destroys entire social units. Moreover, these hunts generate a substantial amount of waste, much of which may be dumped back into the sea.
- Despite the historical significance of pilot whale hunting in the Faroe Islands (often used as a cultural justification for the killing), today the majority of Faroese people do not participate in whaling, nor do they consume cetacean products from the hunt. Today these hunts rely on modern motorized vessels and sophisticated communications techniques and so can hardly be claimed to reflect historical or traditional methods.

"Pilot whales and other small cetaceans are protected in the European Union but massacred on its doorstep in the Faroe Islands," said Sue Fisher, Senior Policy Advisor at the Animal Welfare Institute. "This dissonance makes no sense, especially given the well-known adverse [effects on human health](#) associated with the consumption of pilot whale meat and blubber with high levels of mercury and other contaminants".

"In response to another mass cetacean killing in the Faroe Islands, our new report finds that there is little evidence to support the claims typically used to justify it. The simple truth about the grind is that it is cruel, unsustainable and most Faroese don't participate in it. Further, medical experts raise human health concerns about consuming whale meat and blubber. Sadly, the image of dead cetaceans has become synonymous with the Faroe Islands across the globe. These are sentient animals who experience immense stress and pain during the drive and killing, so it's time to consign such suffering to the history books." said Dr Joanna Swabe, senior director of public affairs, Humane Society International/Europe.

"More than 20,000 pilot whales, Atlantic white-sided dolphins and other cetaceans have been slaughtered in the Faroe Islands since 2000. This is an out-dated, cruel and wasteful practice that does not consider the welfare of the individuals or the social complexities of these cetacean societies." said Sarah Dolman, Senior Ocean Campaigner, of Environmental Investigation Agency UK.

"We hope this report helps to dispel misconceptions about the hunts so the public has a comprehensive understanding of the issue to aid in finally bringing this cruel practice to an end." said Louie Psihoyos, Executive Director of Oceanic Preservation Society.

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About AWI, EIA, HSI, OceanCare, OPSociety, ORCA, Pro Wildlife

The Animal Welfare Institute (awionline.org) is a nonprofit charitable organization founded in 1951 and dedicated to reducing animal suffering caused by people. AWI engages policymakers, scientists, industry, and the public to achieve better treatment of animals everywhere—in the laboratory, on the farm, in



commerce, at home, and in the wild. Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#) for updates and other important animal protection news.

Pro Wildlife is a non-profit organization working to protect wildlife and their habitats worldwide. Our goal is to preserve biodiversity and save animals. In doing so, we care about the survival of species in their habitats, but also about the protection of individual animals. We campaign for better laws and effective protection measures for wildlife. In various countries, we support aid projects for animals in need, help to preserve habitats and advocate for the coexistence of humans and wildlife.

EIA investigates and campaigns against environmental crime and abuse. Its undercover investigations expose transnational wildlife crime, with a focus on elephants, pangolins and tigers and forest crimes such as illegal logging and deforestation for cash crops such as palm oil. It works to safeguard global marine ecosystems by addressing the threats posed by plastic pollution, by-catch and commercial exploitation of whales, dolphins and porpoises. Finally, it works to avert climate catastrophe by strengthening and enforcing regional and international agreements that tackle short-lived climate super-pollutants, including ozone-depleting substances, hydrofluorocarbons and methane, and advocating corporate and policy measures to promote transition to a sustainable cooling sector and away from fossil fuels. It uses its findings in hard-hitting reports to campaign for new legislation, improved governance and more effective enforcement. Its field experience is used to provide guidance to enforcement agencies and it forms partnerships with local groups and activists and support their work through hands-on training.

Since 1989, the international research, policy and education NGO OceanCare has worked for the protection of marine species and the oceans. The organisation holds Special Consultative Status with UN ECOSOC, is accredited to UNEP/UNEA, is partner of a number of regional agreements and Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and has been an observer at the International Whaling Commission (IWC) since 1992. www.oceancare.org

Advancing the welfare of animals in more than 50 countries, Humane Society International works around the globe to promote the human-animal bond, rescue and protect dogs and cats, improve farm animal welfare, protect wildlife, promote animal-free testing and research, respond to natural disasters and confront cruelty to animals in all its forms.

Learn more about our work at hsi.org. Follow HSI on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

Oceanic Preservation Society (opsociety.org) uses visual storytelling to expose crimes against nature and inspire solutions. The team collaborates with activists around the world to highlight some of the most critical issues facing the planet.

ORCA (orca.org.uk), founded in 2001, is a marine conservation charity that is entirely dedicated to the long-term study and protection of whales, dolphins and porpoises and their habitats in oceans worldwide.

¹ <https://heimabeiti.fo/2013-2023>