

Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling

The IWC gives an annual quota to certain countries who have a tradition of hunting for large whales.

These countries include, among others: Denmark (Greenland), The Russian Federation (Siberia), St. Vincent & the Grenadines and the USA (Alaska).

Abundant Species of whales

The minke whale, one of the smallest of the great whales, had not been hunted during the whaling heyday. In contrast, the blue whale, the largest of the whale species, was hunted almost to extinction because of its large size and valuable carcass.

The minke and blue whale species, consume the same type of food. With the worldwide depletion of the blue whale, abundant krill became available. This drastically improved the nutritional situation of the minke whale, resulting in a rapid increase in minke whale populations. This direct competition for food between the two whale species and the rapid increase in minke whale populations appear to have hampered the recovery of blue whale populations.

Saint Lucia's Policy

Saint Lucia supports the sustainable utilization of cetacean resources, based on the right to maintain traditional use of these important resources. Saint Lucia adopts a precautionary principle towards the level of use of these resources. Therefore, Saint Lucia supports the implementation of the RMP, which is consistent with its sustainable use policy.

Saint Lucia continues to be guided by:

- The findings of science;
- The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS);
- The Rio Summit in its support for the sustainable use of natural resources; and,
- The International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (IWC).

For more information about cetaceans contact:

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Whaling Traditions and Policies in Saint Lucia



Introduction of Whaling to the Caribbean

Whaling was introduced to the southern Caribbean in the 18th and 19th century, when whaling vessels from the industrialized countries (in particular the United States) hunted whales for whale oil and bone.

During this period, vessels visited the Caribbean waters in search of humpback whales, pilot whales and occasionally, sperm whales.

In the late 19th century, the islands were used as transshipment points for whale oil and bone and as stop-off points for supplies and recruits for crew. This commercial activity led to the transfer of whaling technology to the people of the Eastern Caribbean.



American whaling

History of Whaling in Saint Lucia

In Saint Lucia (from the late 1930s) whaling evolved into an artisanal fishery for small cetaceans.

The boats and equipment used in this fishery were, and still are, similar in design to those used by the American whalers.



Whaling boat

Today this is a relatively small fishery undertaken by about 20 persons operating out of Castries and Vieux Fort.

The species targeted by this artisanal fishery are fully utilized for food. The meat and blubber is consumed fresh or salted and corned and is cooked in stews or boiled with ground vegetables. The whale and the melon oil is used locally as a tonic, laxative or in medicinal potions used for the cure of a variety of ailments including “lock”.

The local cetacean fishery does not entail the large number of incidental deaths and mass wastage of dolphins and porpoises seen within fisheries undertaken by some of the more industrialized nations.

The International Whaling Commission (IWC)

Following her independence from Britain in 1979, Saint Lucia joined the International Whaling Commission in 1980.

In 1982, a moratorium on whaling was put in place, which was fully implemented in 1985/86. This meant that the 13 species of great whales, which in most cases, had become severely depleted due to commercial harvesting by the Industrialized nations. These great whales came under full protection and could no longer be commercially harvested.

During the moratorium, the IWC developed a Revised Management Procedure (RMP) to set quotas and establish sustainable yields.

However, although the RMP was endorsed in 1994 it has not yet been implemented. Before the RMP can be implemented a Revised Management Scheme (RMS) must be in place to ensure that agreed catch limits are not exceeded and sustainable management is practiced through its established regulations.

The RMS has not yet been developed and it is the source of contention among IWC contracting countries, even though it has been scientifically proven that some species have recovered sufficiently to sustain controlled harvesting.

Until the RMS is agreed and implemented, commercial whaling cannot be resumed.