

SCIENTIFIC CATCHING

Whale of a Loophole

by Bill Wieben

**When is a commercial whaling boat no longer a commercial whaling boat?
Answer: when it becomes a scientific whaling boat.**

At the beginning of 1986 the International Whaling Commission (IWC) won what it and conservationists regarded as an important victory in the battle to save the world's largest animals: a ten-year commercial whaling moratorium starting in the Antarctic.

Within a few months, however, the glow of success soon faded. In what is an enormous loophole, the IWC allows any country to issue an unlimited number of scientific permits for taking whales for research, and to use the products.

Japan, Iceland, Norway and South Korea swiftly moved to exploit the escape clause, not convinced that a number of species might be rare and endangered.

Incredibly, a country can set its own rules for "scientific whaling" — it can make up its own quotas and decide which species to kill.

Japan's proposed "scientific" programme for the Antarctic is to last 12 years. It is divided into three blocks of four, during which different parts of the Antarctic will be "surveyed". Each year, 825 minke whales and 50 sperm whales will be killed. The Japanese Fisheries Agency euphemistically describes this exercise as "assessing whale resources."

The US Government has it in its power to stop Japanese whaling overnight, but it has chosen not to use it. Had the US Supreme Court recently upheld a Fisheries Act amendment that would penalize Japan for "diminishing the effectiveness of the IWC", the Reagan Administration would have been ordered to cut Japan's fishing rights in US waters by half — a move that would have almost certainly brought Japan's whaling to an abrupt halt.

Japan's other strategy for evading the commercial moratorium is to ask the IWC to re-classify its small-type coastal whalers as "small-scale and traditional". They would then come into the same category as Alaskan Eskimos who hunt in the "aboriginal subsistence" category.

When it declared its commercial whaling moratorium, the IWC also announced that a comprehensive assessment of whale stocks would take place during 1990. Japan, Iceland, Korea and Norway are clearly anxious that their whaling fleets do not rust away by then — hence their reason for hunting with scientific permits and gathering data which they hope will justify the resumption of commercial whaling in 1990.

Although New Zealand no longer carries out whaling, we have a direct interest in the

Japanese whaling in the Antarctic, since the minke whales they hunt possibly migrate through New Zealand waters. The most disturbing recent whaling incident in New Zealand occurred on Kapiti Island in 1986, when a sperm whale which died and floated ashore on Kapiti was plundered for whatever was valuable. Whale teeth are in demand as jewellery and other products are used in cosmetics overseas.

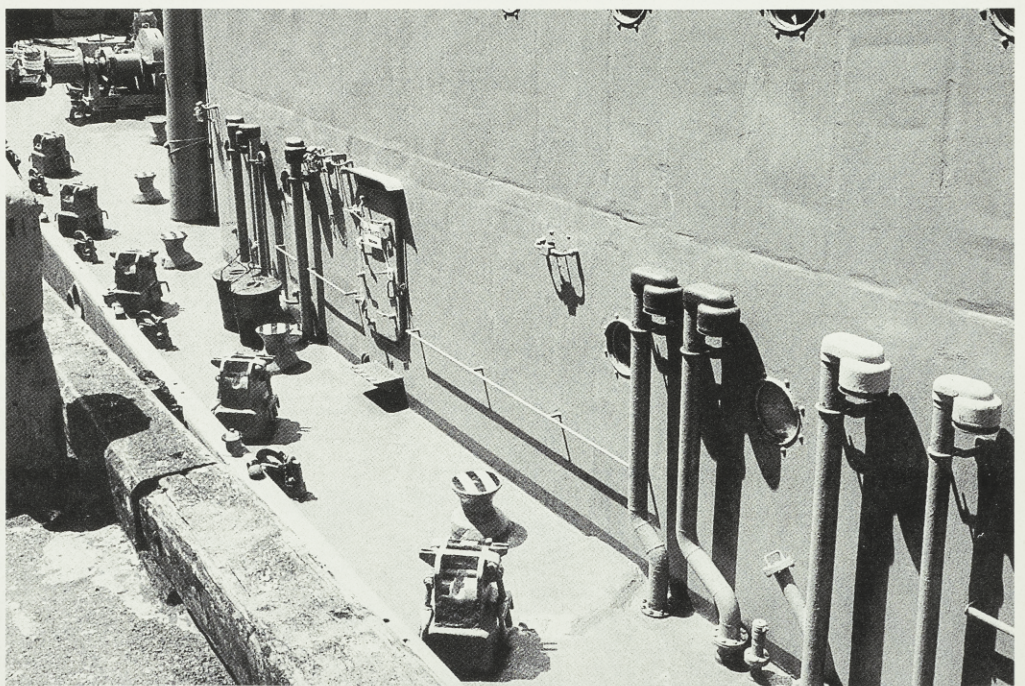
Such plundering also denies legitimate researchers — as opposed to the "scien-

Whale Numbers

Blue Whale	6,000-
Bryde's Whale	80,000
Fin Whale	70,000-80,000
Humpback Whale	6,000-
Minke Whale	300,000
	(Antarctica)
Sperm Whale	500,000
Sei Whale	100,000
Southern Right Whale	3,000



When Greenpeace activist Mark Roach chained himself to this Japanese "scientific" whaling boat in Wellington Harbour in 1985, some of the crew were not amused by his protest. Photo: The Dominion



These winches are used to haul whales up to the sides of the "scientific" whaling boats until they meet with the factory ship.

Photo: Bill Wieben