



HBCA

HUMAN BEHAVIOUR CHANGE FOR ANIMALS

CASE STUDY

INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION

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COUNTRY GLOBAL

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Project Background

Despite an international ban on whaling, agreed by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) in 1982 and implemented in 1986, commercial whaling is still carried out by Norway, Iceland and Japan. These countries either have objections or formal reservations to the moratorium (ban) lodged at the appropriate time according to the Convention or in the case of Japan, continue to hunt whales under 'special permit' or 'scientific whaling'.

The fundamental disagreement between those countries who would like to see the whaling ban lifted and those who believe it needs to remain in place had caused an intractable impasse within the IWC for over 25 years. Discussions at the IWC have revolved around this topic, to which no apparent resolution can be found, creating an atmosphere of hostile politics and a forum which was deemed by many to be evidence of the failure of the IWC as an organisation.

However in 2008 a number of animal welfare NGOs, recognising the danger of the IWC losing its effectiveness, banded together to attempt to take this situation as an opportunity to 'rebrand' the IWC as a conservation body rather than just one which managed the killing of whales.

This would involve changing the hearts and minds of politicians, many of whom had been attending the IWC meetings for decades and were deeply entrenched in the politics surrounding it and building their trust so that they no longer viewed NGOs as part of the problem.

A coalition of NGOs already existed under the name of Whalewatch, a grouping which was coordinated by the organisation World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA), (an organisation now known as World Animal Protection), in collaboration with a number of other prominent animal welfare organisations including; Humane Society International, Environmental Investigation Agency, Whale and Dolphin Conservation, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and Animal Welfare Institute. Whalewatch had been set up a few years earlier to focus on the welfare issues of whaling, one of its major outputs being the production of a comprehensive scientific analysis of the welfare implications of whaling which had been well received by the commission, but due to the polarisation of the politics in the IWC had struggled to create a radical shift in terms of behaviour.

The groups working under the banner of Whalewatch were the initiators of campaign which stretched over several years, and along the way involved a much wider number of organisations.

A number of factors were identified that were impeding progress and which consequently needed to be addressed:

- Different (sometimes conflicting) messages to governments coming from NGO community.
- Government interventions and NGO lobbying activities both heavily focused on whaling issue with a much lower percentage of resources and attention being given to other welfare (and conservation) issues.
- Opportunities for pro-whaling and anti-whaling 'sides' to work together limited/non-existent.
- Deep rooted tensions and feuds existing between governments due to historical interactions on the whaling issue and between governments and NGOs.

"I have recently been reminded of the strength of feeling that exists from citizens of my country on this issue."



Delegates during the 64th annual meeting of the IWC in Panama, 2012

Spoken by the delegate in one of New Zealand's interventions on the issue of whether or not to accept a proposed 'compromise deal' on whaling at the IWC. The statement refers to a global public mobilisation action which had urged the public from countries all over the world to ask their government to protect the welfare of whales and not accept a compromise deal on whaling. This is just one example of where the actions of a coordinated group of NGOs resulted in the desired actions being taken by governments at the International Whaling Commission (IWC).

INSIDE THE IWC

Welfare Concerns

Whilst whaling is undoubtedly a significant animal welfare issue due to the inhumane killing methods that are used, in terms of scale of suffering, there are other issues which already impact, or have the potential to impact, a much larger number of whales. These threats include; entanglement, bycatch, chemical pollution, noise pollution, ship strikes live strandings, and prey depletion. Due to the intractable debates about whaling in the IWC, the body had not been able to effectively progress far in addressing many of these other threats to whales. Consequently whales continued to suffer without any international action being taken to address it.

Overview of Intervention

- A small number of like-minded NGOs worked together to produce an alternative vision for the IWC which they then worked to get a much larger number of organisations to support.
- Significant effort was made to bring on board the wider NGO community so that the majority of organisations were communicating the same message.
- Particular effort was made to get key influential governments to support the vision and to champion particular non-whaling issues within it.
- Governments were lobbied to encourage and facilitate areas where joint working would be possible between pro and anti whaling countries.
- The tone of the campaign was non-confrontational and solution orientated - this was a shift from the fiercely anti-whaling messages that the NGO community had become known for historically and a concerted effort was made to limit whaling focussed discussion in order to facilitate dialogue on the wider issues of whale protection and conservation.

- NGOs invested time into developing very solid and long-lasting relationships with government delegations and building mutual trust - this involved being willing to compromise, taking on board their advice, maintaining confidentiality if given inside information, providing a reliable source of technical and scientifically credible advice, making the effort to get to know individual members of government delegations on a personal level and understanding their perspectives and limitations
- Public mobilisation was used to create an incentive for governments to speak out on the issue but it was done in a very careful way - the point was to remind governments that the public care but messaging was focussed around the positive future envisioned for whales rather than about the bad things currently happening to them. NGOs worked together on coordinated joint actions resulting in much wider reach and consistent messages reaching governments.

A joint workshop on whale welfare was hosted between the UK government and WSPA which analysed the welfare impacts of a number of different anthropogenic threats whales face and involved the participation of experts from outside of the IWC as well as those involved in it, to create fresh thinking. This produced a number of peer reviewed papers which were published creating a credible foundation of information to work from.

The government of Norway was historically hostile towards the UK due to long standing disagreements about whale killing methods. However the UK government put considerable effort into trying to build bridges with Norway and engaging them at every step of the way towards the development of the new welfare proposal (the whale welfare action plan) in an effort to prevent them from blocking it (and getting other pro-whaling governments to do the same).

The issue of entanglement was chosen as an issue which both pro-whaling and anti-whaling governments could get behind and a lot of focus was placed on using this issue as a pilot case to see what could happen when everyone worked together.

Achievements

- The Commission rejected a proposal for a 'compromise deal' on whaling which would have involved the full or partial lifting of the whaling moratorium under a much stricter criteria, including agreement on the number of whales which could be hunted. It was recognised by many governments that the future of the organisation was not in managing the killing of whales but in managing their protection in relation to the myriad of anthropogenic threats they face aside from whaling.
- The whale protection agenda at the IWC has developed considerably - this is measured by the higher percentage of IWC funds now being spent on these activities, the increased involvement of the Secretariat in relevant conservation and biodiversity forums, the duration of time being dedicated to discussion of these issues at IWC Commission meetings and the number of interventions governments are making on these issues.
- For the first time the governments of UK and Norway were able to work together to support a whale welfare issue (entanglement). The fact that such a staunch pro-whaling and anti-whaling country were backing action being taken on the same topic resulted in there being noticeably less resistance from other pro-whaling countries and the desired action being supported by the Commission as a whole when previously it would have been a stalemate situation and rejected. The entanglement issue has continued to grow from strength to strength in the IWC, with the set up of a global whale disentanglement network which is providing practical support to countries with whale entanglement issues.
- The action plan on whale welfare was agreed by consensus by the Commission in 2014, within this work plan are specific work streams on key issues impacting whale welfare and this work is being supported both verbally and financially by member states of both pro and anti-whaling countries.
- A number of workshops and sessions have now taken place dedicated to progressing the welfare action plan and specific issues within it.
- Now that activity is noticeable across a wider range of whale welfare and conservation issues within the Commission the NGO community are seeing more value in focussing their attention on them and trying to influence their progress the IWC, as evidenced by the campaigning materials presented at IWC meetings and the content of NGO interventions made in meetings of the IWC.
- Greater participation of NGOs allowed at IWC meetings - now that NGO communications have become less antagonistic and not solely focused on whaling it has been easier to convince governments and the IWC Secretariat that NGOs should have more active participation in IWC meetings, including speaking rights. This is ultimately of benefit to whale welfare as it means that NGOs working for their protection can have greater influence on governments who have the power to implement protection measures.

Challenges

- Historic bad relations between governments could not be quickly undone and required careful management to make progress - NGOs had to listen to the advice of governments who had their own ideas on what actions would be helpful to move past the impasse.
- NGO egos/brand promotion - it had to be acknowledged that even though NGOs would do a lot of the work, they could not take credit for it publicly as this could result in the work being viewed negatively by whaling nations. Instead NGOs had to agree to be happy with governments being the public face of most of the work that took place.
- Whaling nations continue to kill whales - despite significant progress being made at bringing opposing sides together to work on other welfare issues and the functionality of the IWC of the organisation being improved, whaling still continues and remains to this day the elephant in the corner of the room. NGOs continue to work on the issue, although more effort is being placed on working outside of the IWC and in the whaling countries themselves as it is recognised that an end to whaling probably won't come from the IWC itself.

Sustainability

Although progress can be slow in these forums, the length of time it takes to progress a particular work stream means that governments will usually be unwilling to open it back up again once significant work has gone into it.

Contacting governments to the IWC have been very positive about the changes that have taken place in the organisation, regardless of which side of the fence they sit on the whaling debate as they recognise that everything is functioning better, that there is less friction and antagonistic behaviour and that certain non-whaling work streams are progressing.

Many lessons were learnt from this process and how well they remain embedded in the culture of the organisation will largely depend on the leadership of the organisation. At the time of writing it has been announced that the current Executive Secretary of the IWC is leaving after 7 years in post. He had over seen and championed many of these positive changes so a lot of hope rests on whoever takes over to do the same but it is too early to tell at the moment.

Lessons to Pass On

- NGOs are much more powerful when they can be seen as working together and speaking from the same page. Governments become confused about who to trust if the messages are different from different organisations.
- Importance of adopting a pragmatic approach when trying to create change within intergovernmental organisations - although progress can be frustratingly slow in these types of forums, trying to rush change before the political context is ready can easily backfire and delay progress even further. Incremental steps can be the best way to make progress on sensitive issues.

- Government representatives are human beings and you need to be able to appeal to them on a human level to influence their actions. For example, you can't expect them to respond well if they have never met you before and you make demands on them when they have no prior knowledge of your credibility as a source of advice or if the relationship with them is perceived as being one-way. It is essential to develop a relationship and then build upon it.
- Public mobilisation can help but only if done in an appropriate and carefully targeted way - the representatives of governments in these types of forums will often admit off the record that they need their Ministers to feel some kind of public pressure in order to give them a mandate to take action and if asked will therefore provide advice on what might be an appropriate message to send from the public.
- Governments don't like surprises - it was acknowledged all along that progress could easily be blocked by the whaling nations so a decision was made to try and engage them from a very early stage.

Any Other Information

<http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/nature/whaling-the-great-betrayal-1925387.html>

http://www.hsi.org/assets/pdfs/time_to_refocus_iwc_2012.pdf

<https://iwc.int/welfare>

<https://iwc.int/iwc-workshop-on-welfare-may-2016>

<https://www.worldanimalprotection.us.org/news/positive-steps-whales-international-whaling-commission-adopts-animal-welfare-plan>



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Valuable information is not easily accessible to those planning and involved with projects aiming to apply HBC theories and principles . Hence, HBCA is developing a resource that provides an overview of interventions and the lessons we can learn from them. If you have a case study to submit or any enquiries about this case study, please get in touch.