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Use and Management of Humpback Whales in Bequia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines

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Use and Management of Humpback Whales in Bequia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines¹⁾

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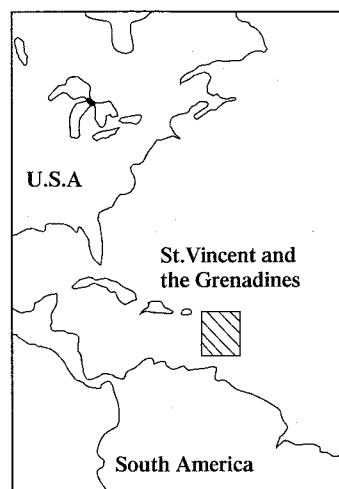
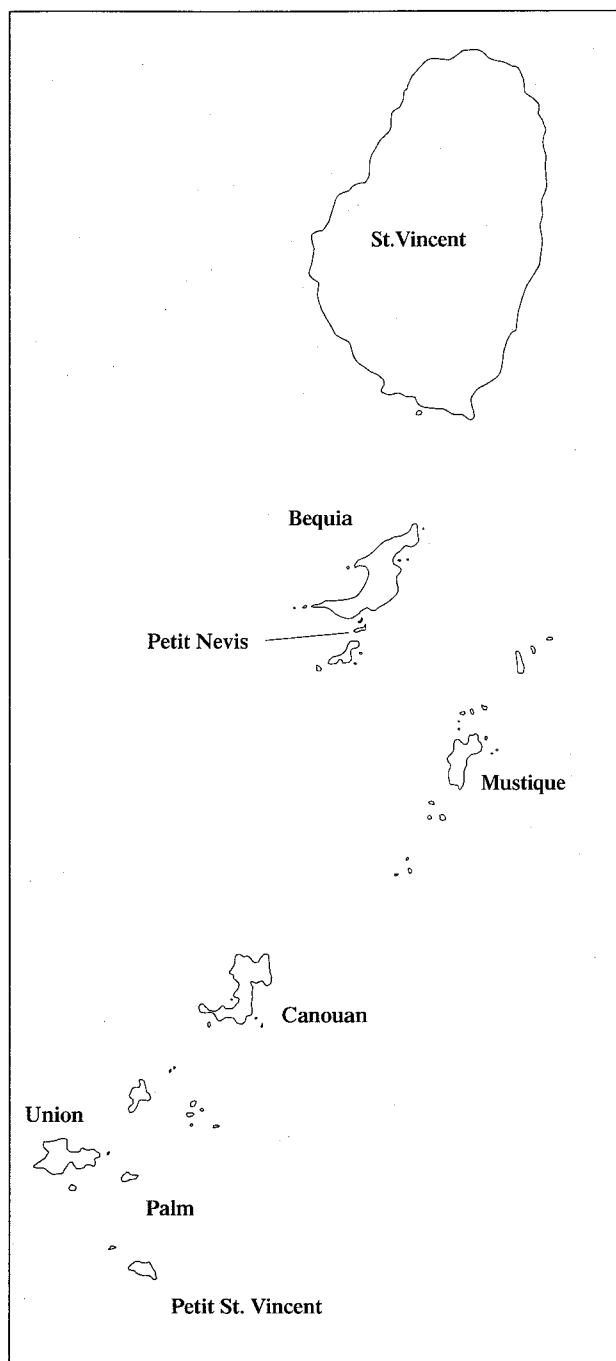
1. INTRODUCTION

Two species of whales are harvested in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, an independent nation in the Caribbean Sea. One is the humpback whale, hunted from the island of Bequia, and the other is the pilot whale, hunted from the island of St. Vincent. Bequia is situated at 13°00' north and 61°15' west (Map 1), and has a total area of 18.1 km² and had an estimated population in 2002 of 5,800.

I conducted seven seasons of humpback whaling-related field research in Bequia between 1991 and 2002²⁾, in an effort to understand the sociocultural and economic aspects of whaling on the island. In this paper, I discuss (a) the history of whaling in Bequia, (b) present whaling conditions and activities with particular emphasis on whaling technology and the required skills, (c) the significance and distribution of whale products within Bequia, (d) the status of humpback whaling and quotas in Bequia as determined at the 51st and 54th annual meetings of the International Whaling Commission, and (e) on the basis of a-d above, suggest that the management of the humpback whale hunt should be left to the Bequia whalers.

2. A BRIEF HISTORY OF BEQUIA WHALING

In the early 19th century, the whaling ships from New England made regular cruises to the Caribbean Sea in search of sperm whales and humpback whales and visited the Lesser



Map 1 Maps of Bequia and Surrounding Areas

Antilles frequently [ADAMS 1971: 55, 59].

American whaling activities in the Grenadines reached a peak during the 1860s-1870s [ADAMS 1971: 60]. During that period, a number of Bequians were employed on the American whaling ships where they learned whaling skills and began whaling independently in 1875 or 1876 [ADAMS 1971: 60]. Their main prey was the humpback whale, which came close enough to shore to be intercepted by whaling boats launched from the beaches [ADAMS 1971: 65].

The indigenous whaling enterprise in Bequia reached its peak ca. 1910, when 100 men were engaged in catching and processing humpback whales [ADAMS 1971: 56]. In the early 1920s, the Grenadines maintained six shore whaling stations, each equipped with three to five whaling boats [ADAMS 1971: 62]. However since 1925, whaling in the Grenadines has declined, with only a few humpback whales being caught annually, and only by whalers from Bequia [ADAMS 1971: 71].

No humpback whales were caught between 1949 and 1957 [ADAMS 1971: 71], but a catch of three humpback whales in 1958 encouraged the whalers, and as a result they constructed two new whaling boats to augment the four boats then in use [ADAMS 1971: 71]. In 1961, they constructed a modern, well-equipped shore station in Petit Nevis [ADAMS 1971: 71]. But, the catch decreased again during the 1970s, and whaling activities at this point were on the verge of collapse [PRICE 1985: 415].

However, four humpback whales were caught in 1982 and three were caught in 1983 [PRICE 1985: 415]. The success of these two years again reactivated the whaling industry, and a new whaling boat was constructed in 1983. For 27 years, from 1958 through 1984, a total of 54 humpback whales were struck and, of these, 44 were landed [PRICE 1985: 419].

Since 1925, the whaling activities in Bequia have depended on successfully catching a few humpback whales a year. Although this has led to a certain fragility in the whaling economy, catches can sustain the livelihood of Bequians. In addition, they contribute to the neighboring peoples in Barbados, Grenada and Trinidad through the export of whale oil for cooking [CALDWELL and CALDWELL 1975: 1105]. Moreover, Bequians have been engaged in whaling not only for monetary considerations but also in order to acquire prestige, with only the strongest and most reliable men being recruited for whaling [ADAMS 1971: 61].

3. CURRENT HUMPBACK WHALING ON BEQUIA

The whaling season begins in early February, when humpback whales head southward to their breeding grounds between the islands of Bequia and Mustique (Map 1). The whaling season potentially lasts until early May, when humpback whales return northward through the same waters.

However, whaling ceases when the catch quota is met. For example, two whales were caught at the end of February in the 1998 whaling season (the quota that year was two), so whaling ended after only two weeks. The 1999 and 2000 whaling seasons ended early, in March in both years, after early attainment of the allowable quota.

The catch during the twelve years from 1991 through 2002 was 13 (Table 1), an average of one whale a year. By the 1990s, as crewmen became older, the number of whaling boats decreased from a total of six boats to only one in 1990-1995. It was the most depressed period

Table 1 The Catch Record of Humpback Whales in Bequia, 1991–2002

1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
0	1	2	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	2	2

(source: the author)

of whaling in years, and for these reasons, the catch was extremely small at that time (three whales in six years), with no whales being caught between 1994 and 1997.

However, a new whaling boat was launched in 1996 and the crew of the new boat, including the harpooner, was much younger. During the 1998 whaling season, both boats succeeded in catching two whales. Without a doubt, this first success in five years renewed the motivation of the whalers and once again increased enthusiasm for whaling, and two whales were caught in each whaling season from 1999 through 2002.

In July 2000, a great harpooner who had led the whaling in Bequia for over forty years, passed away at the age of 79. He was of the fourth generation of the founder of the whaling enterprise in Bequia. Today, the fifth and sixth generations continue the whaling in Bequia.

3.1. The Whaling Boats and Implements

As of 2002, three whaling boats have been in use in Bequia. The prototype of the Bequia whaling boats was the Nantucket-type whaling boat which was 28–30 feet (8.5–9.1 m) long. When the first whaling boat was constructed in Bequia, it was only 25–26 feet (7.6–7.9 m) long [ADAMS 1971: 63]. The current boats are slightly larger. The oldest boat presently used was constructed in 1983 and, as noted above, a second was constructed in 1996. These two boats are said to be 27 feet (8.2 m) long and 7 feet (2.1 m) wide (Photo 1). The third and newest one, which had originally been constructed as a fiberglass sailing boat, was refitted as a whaling

**Photo 1** Two whaling boats on the beach. (2001)

boat in 2000.

The great harpooner who died in 2000 said that he was once dragged under the water with his boat by a harpooned whale, and on another occasion his boat was lifted up on the whale's back and flipped over. Based on experiences such as these, the whaling boats were improved and constructed slightly larger and stronger than the ones first constructed in Bequia.

The oldest (1983) whaling boat is equipped with four harpoons 3 m in length, three lances 3.8 m in length and two shoulder guns 94 cm in length. The second oldest (1996) whaling boat is equipped with four harpoons 3 m long, three lances 3.8 m long and one dart gun 2.47 m long. Both boats are also equipped with a mainsail, a jib, five oars, one steering oar, four paddles and a rudder.

The basic technique of catching a whale is to weaken it by thrusting the hand-held harpoons into its body, and then to kill it by stabbing it with hand lances. Sometimes, a shoulder gun or a dart gun is used to shoot a bomb lance. Since the bomb lance costs 400 East Caribbean dollars (EC\$) (US\$150)³, a significant expense for the whalers, they are used prudently, as a miss is costly. Although these implements for the most part are outdated today, they are still used by the Bequia whalers with considerable pride.

3.2. Organization and Methods of Humpback Whaling

On a Sunday in early February, an Anglican priest blesses the whaling boats, and prays for the safety of the crews and for a successful harvest. Then the whaling season begins.

During the whaling season, the whalers congregate on the beach at Friendship Bay on the windward side of Bequia around 6:00 a.m. every day except Sundays, public holidays and the days when the weather is obviously unsuitable. At that point a decision is made whether to go whaling, which in turn depends on the weather and sea conditions.

When they do go out, the whalers head for the island of Mustique, about 13 km southeast from the bay, at approximately 6:30 a.m. At approximately 8:00 a.m., they arrive at the island. After mooring the boats in the water beside the beach, the crewmen climb a hill and wait there. While waiting, they take turns scanning for whales through binoculars and, using fish caught on the trip over to Mustique, make soup for breakfast.

Meanwhile, a lookout and helpers remain on a hill back on Bequia, scanning for whales through binoculars. If they spot a whale, they inform the crewmen on Mustique using a marine radio. The whaling boats then start to pursue the whale(s). If they successfully intercept and kill the whale, they, with the help of a fishing boat with an engine, tow it to the shore station at Petit Nevis, where it is processed. This routine continues throughout the three-month whaling season or until they have caught their quota.

Six crewmen serve on board each whaling boat (Photo 2). From the bow to the stern, they are: (1) harpooner, (2) bow oarsman, (3) midshipman, (4) tub oarsman, (5) leading oarsman and (6) captain.

When rowing, the harpooner, midshipman and leading oarsman sit to port and the bow oarsman and tub oarsman sit to starboard. The captain handles the steering oar at the stern. Accordingly, there are three oars on the starboard side and two on the port side. When sailing, all members except the captain sit or stand on one side according to the wind direction and the captain steers at the stern.



Photo 2 Six crewmen of a whaling boat. (1997)

The harpooner has absolute authority over whaling decisions. When the boat is about 10 feet (3 m) behind the whale, the harpooner thrusts the first harpoon into it, and then the second, the third and subsequent harpoons. After a “Nantucket sleigh ride” on the sea, if necessary, the harpooner shoots a bomb lance into the whale. Finally, he jumps onto its back and plunges a hand lance into its lungs as a formal finishing stab.

The bow oarsman has the role of accurately passing on to the captain information from the harpooner. Immediately after the harpooner has thrust the first harpoon into the whale, the bow oarsman lowers the sprit, a small spar that crosses the sail diagonally. Then he ties ropes onto the second and third harpoons, and hands the harpoons, lances and a shoulder gun to the harpooner (see also leading oarsman, below), and ensures the ropes remain untangled when the harpooner thrusts a harpoon. After the whale has been killed, the bow oarsman dives into the sea and sews up the whale’s mouth so that it does not fill with seawater and sink.

The midshipman operates the jib, a triangular sail set forward of the mast, according to the wind direction while sailing. He also furls the jib tightly to let it fall down immediately after the harpooner has thrust the first harpoon into the whale. After the whale has been killed, the midshipman also dives into the sea with the bow oarsman and assists the bow oarsman in sewing up the whale’s mouth.

The tub oarsman removes the cover of a tub containing a rope attached the first harpoon, allowing it to unfurl immediately after the harpooner has thrust the first harpoon into the whale. He also pours seawater on the rope, which is wound around the loggerhead after the whale is struck in order to reduce the heat generated by friction on the rope when the whale hauls the whaling boat through the water after being harpooned.

The leading oarsman removes the mainsheets from the mainsail, which he tightly furls to

allow it to fall immediately after the harpooner has thrust the first harpoon into the whale. He also takes out ropes, the shoulder gun, bomb lances and other items from the stern and hands them to the bow oarsman upon request. In addition, the leading oarsman is responsible for moving the ballast when necessary under the captain's instructions, and also bails water out from the boat when necessary.

The captain steers the boat from the stern, adjusts the mainsail and takes all responsibility for sailing the boat. Immediately after the harpooner has thrust the first harpoon into the whale, the captain quickly winds the rope around the loggerhead. He also keeps the boat a certain distance from the whale, making it easier for the harpooner to thrust the second and subsequent harpoons. In the past, the captain changed places with the harpooner after the latter had thrust the harpoons, after which the captain killed the whale with a hand lance or a bomb lance. Nowadays, however, it is the harpooner who kills the whale.

The harpooner and captain require a high level of skill in harpooning and steering the boat. However, it appears that the other crewmen can manage their roles with training onboard if they are capable fishermen. Generally, an apprentice crewman joins a whaling crew as a leading oarsman and is promoted, step by step, from tub oarsman to midshipman and then to bow oarsman. A bow oarsman is equivalent to an apprentice harpooner, and sits behind the harpooner where he learns harpooning skills.

3.3. The Distribution of the Whale Products

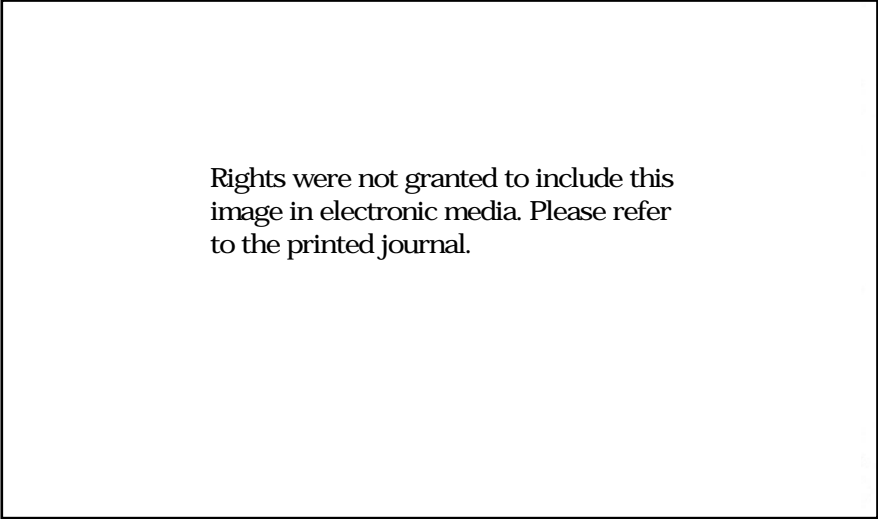
In the Bequia whale fishery, a "share system" is used in lieu of wages. Harvested whales are processed at the shore station in Petit Nevis (Photo 3), and the whale meat and blubber are separated and distributed to all persons involved in the whaling operation.

In 1998, the meat was divided into eighteen equal shares. The two boat owners received two shares each and the twelve crewmen, the lookout and the owner of the shore station received one share each. Blubber, on the other hand, was divided into three equal shares. The two boat owners received one share between them, the two harpooners and the two captains, who were called officers, received one share among them, and the other eight crewmen, the lookout and the owner of the shore station received one share among them.

While the harpooner and captain received the same share of whale meat as the other crew members, they received a larger share of blubber. This reflects the fact that whale oil was rendered from blubber and exported to England and the U.S. in the early 20th century [ADAMS 1971: 69], and the sale of the oil accounted for the major part of the economic return of the whaling industry.

Each man's share, except for the portion given to his own family and gifts to relatives and friends, was sold to other Bequians at the shore station. The selling price of both whale meat and blubber was EC\$4 (US\$1.5) per pound in 1998. The unsold whale meat was salted, sundried and shipped to the market in Kingstown, St. Vincent and sold at EC\$5 (US\$1.9) per pound. These selling prices had not changed since 1993.

The distribution of the whale products through a share system, and their redistribution as gifts and through cash sales play a significant role in maintaining the whaling culture, allowing it to be passed from generation to generation. The consumption of the whale meat at least once a year reinforces the concept that the people of Bequia are residents of a whaling island.



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Photo 3 A humpback whale being processed. (1998)

At the end of February 1998, the inhabitants of the island of St. Vincent were informed that humpback whales had been caught in Bequia. They visited the island to obtain raw whale meat but most were unable to do so since, even though the whale meat was sold for cash, not everyone necessarily had an equal opportunity to purchase it. Unless people have a certain kinship relationship with the whalers or Bequians, they are unable to obtain raw whale meat. Although a cash income is important to the whalers, they are not necessarily engaged in whaling only for money. Typically, the whalers sell the whale products to the people who know the cultural background of the whaling activity in Bequia well. By doing so, they get “spiritual fulfillment” as well as economic gains.

3.4. Historical Systems of Whale Product Sharing

On the basis of information given in Adams [ADAMS 1971: 69–70], the share system in 1966 was different than that of 1998. In the case of the blubber, a third was given to the owner of the whale fishery (see below), another third was allocated to the officers (harpooners and captains), and the remaining third was divided equally among all the other crew members. As for the whale meat, a quarter was given to the owner of the whale fishery and the remaining three quarters were divided equally among all the crew members.

A few remarks should be made concerning the differences between my own research results in 1998 and those of Adams in 1966. Although all the blubber was divided into three shares in 1966 and 1998, the individual recipients were different. In 1966, the owner of the whale fishery owned a shore station and several whaling boats, and paid all costs of maintaining the whaling activities. In 1998, the two boat owners paid the costs of construction and repair of the whaling boats and almost all expenses relating to the whaling implements. Only the cost of the cartridges for the bomb lance was paid by all of the crew members. The shore station had not been renovated

since construction, and had low maintenance costs. Therefore, in 1998, the whaling enterprise was essentially operated by the boat owners, and the shares that originally had gone to the whale fishery owner were reserved for the boat owners. On the other hand, in 1998, the owner of the shore station, who had inherited the shore station from the owner of the whale fishery, received part of one-third of a share as a fee for the use of the shore station. Changes in the distribution of whale meat are more difficult to determine, due to the lack of detailed information. However, given that in 1998 the boat owners received four eighteenthths, their share (approximately 22%) was essentially the same as the share for the whale fishery owner in 1966 (25%).

The social conditions surrounding whaling have changed considerably over the last century, and the economic value of whale oil has declined. Consequently, the economic importance of blubber vis-a-vis whale meat is now reversed. However, the share system itself has changed little during this period.

4. INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE AND DOMESTIC REGULATIONS ON BEQUIA WHALING

4.1. International Pressure on Bequia Whaling

At the 34th annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission held in 1982, a "moratorium on commercial whaling" was adopted. As a result, member countries of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW) are currently given no catch quota for restricted whale species, except in the case of "aboriginal subsistence whaling".

Aboriginal subsistence whaling refers to "whaling for purposes of local aboriginal consumption carried out by or on behalf of aboriginal, indigenous or native peoples who share strong community, familial, social and cultural ties related to a continuing traditional dependence on whaling and on the use of whales" [FREEMAN et al. 1988: 79].

The harvesting of humpback whales in Bequia was approved as a form of aboriginal subsistence whaling at the 39th annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission held in 1987, and a quota of three humpback whales a year was permitted for the 1987/88 to 1989/90 whaling seasons⁴⁾. This catch quota was reduced to two whales a year beginning in the 1993/94 whaling season.

In May 1999, the 51st annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission was held in Grenada, a neighboring country of St. Vincent and the Grenadines⁵⁾. This was the final year of the three-year catch quota period (1996/97–1998/99). The government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines requested a renewal of its quota of two humpback whales a year. However, anti-whaling governments, such as the Netherlands, New Zealand, the U.K. and the U.S., considered the catch in 1998 an infraction of ICRW guidelines [IWC 2000: 14]. They considered this an infraction because they regarded the two whales that were caught together in 1998 as "a cow and calf". They criticized St. Vincent and the Grenadines for acting in violation of Paragraph 14 of the Schedule of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling, which states in part, "it is forbidden to take or kill suckling calves or female whales accompanied by calves" [IWC 2000: 14].

On the other hand, the government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines indicated that it "did not believe that the takes constituted an infraction" [IWC 2000: 14] and "since it had been

reported that the smaller animal had no milk in its stomach [and thus] it was not suckling" [IWC 2000: 15].

Antigua and Barbuda, Japan and Norway interpreted the paragraph as follows. "Paragraph 14 is part of the provisions established for commercial baleen whale catches and does not apply to the aboriginal subsistence whaling by St. Vincent and the Grenadines" [IWC 2000: 15]. However, the interpretation by the Netherlands, New Zealand and the U.S. was that "Paragraph 14 applied to all whaling operations for baleen whales, including aboriginal subsistence whaling" [IWC 2000: 15].

The government of Japan argued against those governments mentioned above from the viewpoints of resources and culture. Japan's assertion was as follows. "The proposed catch of two was from a population now estimated at more than 10,000 animals" [IWC 2000: 15] and "this non-issue [i.e. killing of a whale calf] had taken too long, since people commonly eat small chickens, lamb and veal" [IWC 2000: 18]. However, the anti-whaling governments did not accept this argument. In the end, however, the request by St. Vincent and the Grenadines was approved by consensus, but a number of conditions were imposed on its whaling.

4.2. An Interim Compromise in 2002

In May 2002, the 54th annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission was held in Shimonoseki, Japan⁶). The year 2002 was again the final year of the three-year catch quota period (2000–2002). The government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines presented a draft of regulations for whaling in Bequia [SVG 2002a] and requested a quota of four humpback whales a year for the 2003 through to 2007 whaling seasons [SVG 2002b]. This request was made on the premise that the hunt of humpback whales in Bequia fulfills three specific needs: sociocultural, nutritional, and economic [SVG 2002b: 2].

The sociocultural importance of whaling in Bequia has been documented in Adams (1971), Price (1985), Ward (1995), and Hamaguchi (2001). Briefly, "the whalers are honored because whaling in Bequia is an old tradition that requires skill and bravery on the part of the whalers", and "the islanders take pride in their success and welcome the contribution of meat and fat to the island diet" [SVG 2002b: 2].

Regarding the nutritional contribution, in 1982, the year the moratorium on commercial whaling was adopted, two humpback whales would have provided some 11% of animal protein consumed in Bequia. In 2002, the population of Bequia was double that of 1982⁷), and two whales provided only 6% of the required animal protein [SVG 2002b: 3]. Therefore, as of 2002, a quota of four humpback whales a year was required to provide an amount of protein equivalent to that obtained in 1982 [SVG 2002b: 4]. The U.S. government used essentially the same calculation method in its request for a renewal of the quota of bowhead whales for Iñupiat and Yupiit in Alaska. That is, it established a presumptive need in the past by calculating the average per capita consumption of whale meat during a period of base years, and then raised this estimate by the increase in the human population to establish present needs [see USA 2002]. Therefore, no governments were in doubt about the proposed calculation of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

The economic importance of humpback whales for the Bequians can be calculated in the same manner as nutritional needs. In 1982, the cost of replacing the products from two whales

would have amounted to approximately 13% of the total cost of all imported meat and poultry [SVG 2002b: 3]. As a result of population growth, as of 2002, the equivalent value (and thus savings) of products resulting from the whale harvest had dropped to 7%. Therefore, in economic terms, a quota of four humpback whales a year was needed to compensate for the relative economic loss.

The request by the government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines was approved in principle. The agreement states, "For the seasons 2003–2007 the number of humpback whales to be taken by the Bequians of St. Vincent and the Grenadines shall not exceed 20... The quota for the seasons 2006 and 2007 shall only become operative after the Commission has received advice from the Scientific Committee that the take of 4 humpback whales for each season is unlikely to endanger the stock"⁸).

At this same meeting, the U.S. government requested a renewal of its quota of bowhead whales for Iñupiat and Yupiit in Alaska. The governments of the U.S. and of St. Vincent and the Grenadines settled the matter through a compromise between them, and both governments supported each other's request. This compromise turned out to be favorable to the whalers of Bequia, but unfavorable to the whalers of Alaska. The request by the government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines was adopted without a vote. On the other hand, the request by the U.S. government was rejected by vote. (The request was finally accepted without a vote at the special meeting of the International Whaling Commission held in October 2002.)

4.3. Domestic Regulations on Bequia Whaling

Bequia whalers have to date engaged in whaling with relatively few restrictions, other than the imposed catch quota. That is, there are no local regulations or local management systems. From the beginning of the whaling season, the whalers attempt to catch any whale encountered, since the number of opportunities for harvesting the whales cannot be predicted.

Two whales were caught each year from 1998 through 2002 (Table 1). In all cases, these were cow and calf pairs. However, as discussed above, from the viewpoint of some IWC members, the taking of cow and calf pairs is a violation of the Schedule of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (see 4.1.).

In a draft of "the Regulation of Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling in Bequia" [SVG 2002a]⁹), which was presented to the 54th annual meeting of International Whaling Commission held in 2002 by the government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the government attempted to address the issue of the taking of cow and calf pairs.

According to the draft, "No whaler may strike a humpback whale calf or a lactating female humpback whale accompanied by a calf or calves" [SVG 2002a: Part II.B.]. "Calf" is defined as a "juvenile whale having milk in its stomach" [SVG 2002a: Part I.C.7.], and "lactating female" is defined as a "female having milk in its mammary glands" [SVG 2002a: Part I.C.8.]. Accordingly, to this domestic regulation, Bequia whalers are allowed to harvest hungry calves whose stomachs contain no milk or non-lactating females accompanied by calves. Note, however, that this is simply a confirmation of their actual whaling practices.

Further domestic regulations relate to permits and the training and qualifications of whaling crew members. Specifically, "No member may engage in whaling except under the control of a whaling captain who is in possession of a valid whaling permit issued by the Chief Fisheries

Officer and approved by the Minister” [SVG 2002a: Part III.A.], and “The Chief Fisheries Officer may establish certification guidelines and a certification process for whaling captains, harpooners, riflemen, divers, towboat operators, and other whaling team members” [SVG 2002a: Part IV.].

Thus, it is clear that the government is attempting to control Bequia whaling activities. Unfortunately, these regulations do not reflect the reality of the organization of Bequia whaling. Regarding Regulation Part III.A., as noted previously (see 3.2.), the harpooner is in charge of whaling, controlling every aspect except for the handling of the whaling boat. The captain is responsible only for the operation of the boat. Thus, the argument could be made that it should be the harpooner who is issued the whaling license, not the captain. Regarding Regulation Part IV., skills are acquired through experience; that is, a whaler who develops appropriate skills becomes a harpooner and takes responsibility for the whale hunt. Thus, the role of a whaling crew member is essentially determined through a self-regulating system, and it could be argued that the certification guidelines may in fact be redundant.

Although fortunately the catch quota was doubled, if the regulation of whaling in Bequia is enacted in the Legislature, the international pressure on managing humpback whales will become stronger. This is because anti-whaling governments will probably put pressure on the government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines to observe the regulation in the annual meetings of International Whaling Commission (see 4.1.). As a result, the government may force the whalers to observe the regulation. That will be unfortunate for both the whalers and other inhabitants of Bequia.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

As long as the government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a member of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling, international regulation is unavoidable for the whalers of Bequia. However, since it has been agreed that “a catch up to four whales annually will be unlikely to harm this [North Atlantic humpback whales] stock” [IWC 2002: 11] at the 54th annual meeting of International Whaling Commission held in 2002, increased domestic regulations or special management systems may not be necessary.

Furthermore, the whaling season ends when four whales are harvested. It could be argued that as long as the traditional whaling techniques employing hand harpoons and hand lances in whaleboats powered by sail and oars are continued, they may not be able to catch many more even if they desired. Therefore, assuming the technology remains the same and no new whaling crews and boats are added, Bequia whaling may, in one sense, be ‘self-regulating’, in any case.

One problem Bequia whalers face now and into the foreseeable future is protests by various anti-whaling organizations, which, for example, initiated “tourist boycott campaigns” against Caribbean states in 1994 [WILSON 1995: 84], and broadcast through the internet scenes of the processing of a humpback whale caught off Bequia in 1999 [HAMAGUCHI 2001: 56].

Fortunately, today’s generation of whalers is younger and more active. Not only the stock of North Atlantic humpback whales but also the whalers of Bequia are robust. In my opinion, human rights are much more important than animal rights. For the people of Bequia, whaling

is a way of life that makes it worth living.

NOTES

- 1) An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Monbukagakusho International Symposium 2002, "New Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Study of Indigenous Use and Management of Migratory Marine Resources" (December 2nd-6th, 2002, National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan). I would like to express my thanks to the chief organizer of this symposium, Professor Nobuhiro Kishigami of National Museum of Ethnology and the participants who provided me with useful comments.
- 2) Field research was carried out in February 1991, March 1993, May 1994, March 1997, March 1998, August 2000 and March 2001, for a total equivalent of three months.
- 3) 1 US dollar was equivalent to 2.67 EC dollars during the research period.
- 4) The IWC allocated a catch quota for Bequia based on "double years" from the 1987/88 to the 1998/99 whaling seasons. From the 2000 whaling season, it was allocated based on a calendar year. I have no detailed information on this change. But as I describe above, the whaling season begins in early February. On the other hand, Adams writes, "Preparation for the whaling season started in early November" [ADAMS 1971: 63].
- 5) I attended the meeting as a member of the Japan delegation.
- 6) I attended the meeting as a member of the St. Vincent and the Grenadines delegation.
- 7) The estimated population in 1982 is 3,191, and that in 2002 is 5,815 [SVG 2002b: 3].
- 8) IWC, "Final Press Release". 22 June 2002 <<http://www.iwcoffice.org/2002PressRelease.htm>>.
- 9) This draft was still subject to debate by the Legislature of St. Vincent and the Grenadines during the 54th annual meeting of International Whaling Commission.

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