

KENDALL WHALING MUSEUM MONOGRAPH SERIES N° 10

Whaling 1937-1967: The International Control of Whale Stocks



Sir Gerald Elliot

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Whaling 1937-1967: The International Control of Whale Stocks by Sir Gerald Elliot.

Kendall Whaling Museum Monograph Series N° 10. (Stuart M. Frank, Series Editor and Designer).

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FRONT COVER: *Harpooneer*. The 90mm harpoon, with its long shaft and exploding grenade tip, is loaded at the ready in the muzzle of a swivel cannon on the prow of a diesel-powered whale-catcher. The vintage of the photo is indicated by the type and model of gun and the pre-war harpoon type. Anonymous archival photo, circa 1935-40. [Kendall Whaling Museum collection.]

ABOVE: *Soviet Floating-Factory Whaleship Slava*. Oil on canvas by Willy Makrozhitski (Ukrainian, born 1928). The *Slava*, 12,639 tons, shown here outward bound from Sevastopol in 1958, entered the Soviet fleet as war reparations in 1946, and was the first Soviet ship to go whaling in the Antarctic. The large plaques adorning the superstructure under the bridge are Socialist medals. Size: 24 x 39 inches (61 x 100 cm). [Kendall Whaling Museum photo by Mark Sexton. #O-485.]

BACK COVER: *Whale-chaser Stora*, in service from 1929 to 1963. Anonymous archival photo. [Kendall Whaling Museum.]

Foreword

The annual Whaling History Symposium was established at the Kendall Whaling Museum in 1975 to provide a regular forum for the discussion and analysis of any and all matters pertaining to the fascinating phenomenon of human interaction with whales, from the prehistoric whale hunt to current scientific endeavors to understand and describe these majestic creatures. Held each October and open to the public as well as to the scholarly community, the Symposium regularly addresses issues of history, anthropology, material culture, the fine arts, decorative arts, art history, literature, folklore, historic preservation, public policy, public administration, and the sciences. Over the years it has featured leading scholars and educators from more than a dozen nations on four continents, whose academic disciplines have been as diverse as the subject matters delineated. The Symposium has evolved into a sought-after podium of some modest international renown, the only forum of its kind in the world, characteristically bringing together highly qualified experts with widely divergent views spanning the entire range of history and the geography of all seven continents, focused on what is often a controversial and contentious subject.

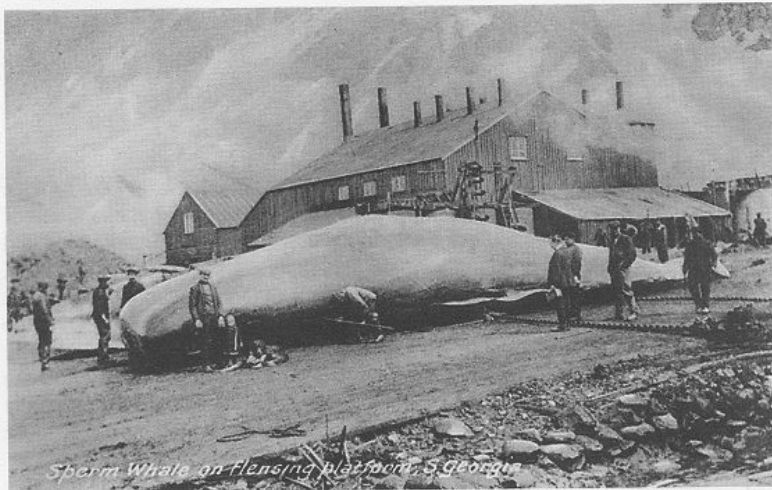
At center stage throughout have been the peculiar history of human exploitation of whales over the past two or three millennia, and the dramatic transformation of our global outlook in the twentieth century. In recent decades, many cultures—notably including most of the industrially developed world—have reached a point of consensus in regarding whales as worthy of protection and have sought to alleviate pressures on dwindling whale stocks through polemic and by providing viable alternatives. The international community has progressed to the point of banning any commercial whale hunt, at least for the time being. Certainly, not all of the world's peoples concur in views which, pioneered by Greenpeace, are now taken as gospel—and taken for granted—in some primary-school classrooms. However, the current consensus extends far enough, at least, to be a conspicuous concern among whaling nations and former whaling nations and among cultures that still practice indigenous or subsistence whaling.

There is a danger that all of this will be taken for granted. In our age of ecology, concern for the future welfare of our planet, and admiration of whales as some of the most interesting and noble species that inhabit it, we are apt to take too much for granted. The statistical data that provides an empirical basis for any responsible prognosis about the future survival of whales, and the sentiments that now enthrall us about whales and enable us to identify them as a separate and distinct caste among species that are potentially endangered, are not the result of serendipity or divine revelation, handed down at the time of Creation, suddenly visible to all intelligent people who would take the time to look. They are not accidents. It is essential that we see them for what they are, as points of view and scientific advances and environmentally conscientious achievements, the results of hard work and diplomacy over many years of dedication and thoughtful consideration. Our increasing, benign mysticism about the intrinsic value of natural phenomena comes with an alarming new realization of human technological ability to impair or destroy the fabric of Nature and so, too, our own habitat. Unless we perceive whatever advances we have made as the products of collaboration, compromise, and consensus, we are in danger of losing them through indolence and un-vigilance.

Among the more than two hundred distinguished experts who have addressed the Whaling History Symposium during its first twenty-one years, one of the most distinguished is Sir Gerald Elliot. Knighted for his service as Managing Director and, later, Chairman of Christian Salvesen PLC, which was for many years Britain's largest and most influential whaling concern, he was not only a firsthand witness to the evolution of whale-stock management policy, but actively participated in the formulation of many of the protocols and regulations in place today. These protocols and regulations, established to conserve species for continued hunting, may incidentally have saved several species from total annihilation. From just after World War II until Salvesen discontinued whaling in 1963, Sir Gerald oversaw virtually every aspect of the Salvesen company's whaling operations, at the home base in Edinburgh, at the shore facilities on South Georgia, on the whaling grounds in Antarctica, and, ultimately, the dissolution of whaling activities and disposal of its equipment. There could be no better informed or more authoritative voice to articulate the circumstances of modern whaling that brought us to the point we are at today, nor any more astute and visionary a person to evaluate whether efforts to control the hunt and manage stocks have in any way succeeded.

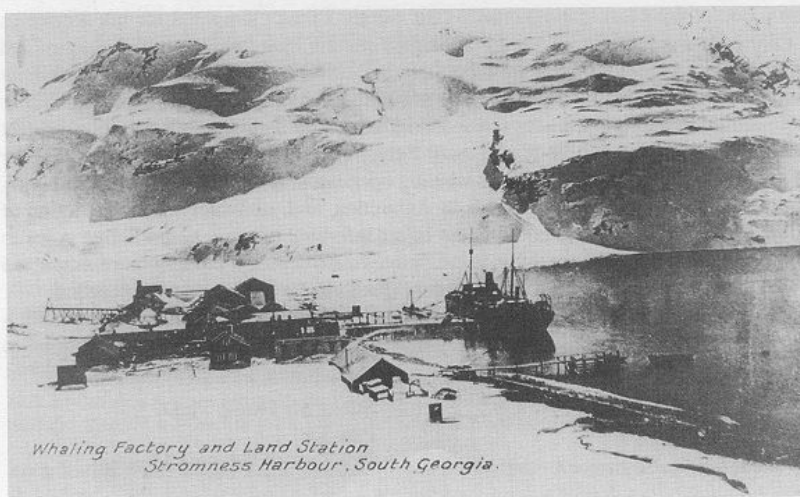
We are grateful to have benefitted from Sir Gerald's insights and wisdom at our twenty-first annual Whaling History Symposium in October 1996, and we are delighted to be able to make his extraordinary contribution to whaling history accessible as a permanent fixture of the literature.

Stuart M. Frank, Ph.D.
Director
The Kendall Whaling Museum



*Sperm whale on a flensing platform, S. Georgia, photographed by the Magistrate, E.B. Binnie, circa 1916. [Kendall Whaling Museum archival photo. The photographer's identity is known from a similar image, lacking the title inscribed on the plate here, in Robert Headland's *The Island of South Georgia* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 118.]*

King Edward Cove. The Capital of S. Georgia. Anonymous photo, possibly taken by Magistrate E.B. Binnie, circa 1916. [Kendall Whaling Museum collection.]



Whaling Factory and Land Station, Stromness Harbour, South Georgia. Anonymous photo, possibly taken by Magistrate E.B. Binnie, circa 1916. [Kendall Whaling Museum collection.]

Whaling 1937-1967: The International Control of Whale Stocks

I am very pleased to have the opportunity of addressing this distinguished gathering on the international control of whaling during the last thirty years of the Antarctic whaling industry. It is one of the duties of age to make sure that before you disappear from the earth you have put in your contribution to the records of your era. Future historians will decide that it was prejudiced, incomplete or just factually wrong, but at least you will have made sure that later generations are given a full picture of the past, and the opportunity of learning from it.

The story of international whaling control is one of good intentions, conscientious deliberation, and almost total failure. The governments of the world's nation states, with all the power that they could muster, were unable to stop the whaling stocks of the Antarctic, and indeed of the globe, being reduced from great abundance to a scarcity at which they risked following the same path as the American buffalo to total annihilation.

I have chosen 1937 as the starting point for intense international interest in whaling control, but national control began a good deal earlier. The first modern whalers who set up in the Antarctic at South Georgia in 1904 had come from the whaling grounds off the Norwegian coast, where Svend Foyn's new methods had founded a prosperous industry, now after twenty years declining as the whales grew scarcer. The British government, which was sovereign over South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula, was well acquainted with what was happening in the north and determined from the start to keep this new industry under control.

The success of the first South Georgia station at Grytviken produced a flood of applications for licenses to establish shore stations or to operate floating factories in the harbours of South Georgia, and in the South Shetlands and Antarctic Peninsula (Graham Land, as it was then called) further south. The British government, through the Colonial Office, was firm and even handed in resisting the clamour for concessions. The number of licenses issued was limited and the operator was required to work up the whole carcass, not simply taking the blubber and discarding the rest, as the pioneers had done.

My own company, Christian Salvesen, set up its whaling station on South Georgia in 1909. Having got its licenses it was vociferous in its own interest in urging the government to restrict further licenses. It maintained also that if more were to be issued British companies should be favoured over Norwegians, a claim disdainfully rejected by our Colonial Office.

That regime worked pretty well up to the mid 1920s. Whaling extended to the South Orkneys and some licenses were issued to cover that area, but there was no general expansion of licenses. Apart from limiting the total catching effort and discouraging waste, the British government applied a number of measures to assist stock conservation. The catching season was restricted, and a small export tax was levied on oil to finance scientific research on whales. In 1921 it declared a total ban on the catch of humpbacks, which, after enormous catches in the early years, had almost disappeared. The other main species in the catch, blues and fins, seemed to be holding up well and no further controls seemed necessary.

That happy state was however short-lived. The authority of the British government was legally based on assumed sovereignty over the Antarctic harbours and the sea around up to the internationally accepted three mile limit. Towards the end of the 1920s the Antarctic fleet, developing larger factory ships and more powerful catchers, started to move outside the traditional harbours of the west Antarctic, where catches were now declining, and into the open sea. The new generation of floating factories was able to operate much more effectively in open waters through the invention of the stern slipway, allowing the whales to be brought up on deck instead of having to be flensed alongside. A further important advance was the introduction of evaporators for producing fresh water on board, making the ship independent of water supply from the shore.

The British government hung on to its authority as long as it could. In 1923 the great Norwegian pioneer, C.A. Larsen, who had set up the first South Georgia station at Grytviken, persuaded one of the Norwegian companies to try its luck in the Ross Sea, at the opposite extremity of the continent. The question then arose whether the expedition needed a license and, if so, from whom? The British government was in no doubt that, if only from its sovereignty over South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula, it had a prior claim on the rest of the continent. It took ownership of the continental area adjacent to the Ross Sea and issued the company concerned with a license to operate. The Norwegians might well have contested this right both in international law and on the basis that the factory would be operating close to the pack ice off the coast and not near the coast itself. The Norwegian government, however, did not want to challenge the British government, as its other whaling operators were dependent on licenses for the West Antarctic, and it appreciated that a license regime in this new area could benefit the company in the future by keeping out competition.

As more of the licensed whaling expeditions left harbour fishing to work in the ice, and new expeditions arrived to operate without license outside the three mile limit, the authority of the British government evaporated. By 1929 harbour fishing was almost obsolete. The British government continued to have control of the substantial catching operations from South Georgia; but the rest of the whaling fleet was now on the high seas, outside the writ of any government but that of the flags that they wore. The initial move was to areas close to and sheltered by the ice pack, but the fleets were soon ranging over the open seas all the way round the continent. The opening of vast new whaling grounds, linked with a rising whale oil price, brought an enormous expansion in the fleet. In 1927/28 there were seventeen floating factories with sixty-one catchers in the Antarctic; in 1930/31 this had risen to forty-one floating factories and two hundred catchers, with a rise in whale oil production from 733,000 barrels to 3,400,000.

It was at that time the Norwegian government set up the first national whaling law. This came partly in response to pressure from the British governments which wanted its conservation measures continued and saw the Norwegian operators, who still dominated the industry, as predatory and wasteful. The Norwegian law of 1929 followed much of the British government regime, but added a ban on the catch of right whales and set minimum sizes for blue and fin whales. It formed the basis of the Geneva Convention, which was signed in 1931, with a lot of pressure from the USA, where a strong lobby for whale conservation was building up. This culminated in the Whaling Convention of 1934. The conventions were intended to cover whaling all over the world, though, since by far the largest catch of whales came from Antarctic pelagic whaling, that was the dominant area of concern.

Note that these conventions were only a first step. They did not address the central requirement of conservation, the limiting of yearly catch to a level that could be sustainable in the future without depleting stocks. That was attempted by the whaling companies themselves in the 1930s through private quota agreements. They were worried that a continuation of the enormous catch level of 1931 would destroy both the stocks and the level of whale oil prices. These industry quota agreements were remarkably effective in restricting catch, far more than anything achieved later by the International Whaling Commission. They were however only possible because the industry was still entirely Norwegian and British. The British companies were largely manned and managed from Norway, so there was a general identity of interest between the operators. That underlying unity of the industry was destroyed when first Japan, in 1934, and Germany, in 1936, entered the Antarctic, both with the declared aim of building up large fleets. With that the problem of whale conservation had to move from the sphere of industrial cooperation to international politics.

A new Convention in 1937 (the London Agreement) brought in Germany, but not Japan, which refused to adhere. The only significant new contribution it made was the exclusion of

floating factories from catching baleen whales outside the Antarctic and, by an annexe in 1938, the creation of a whale sanctuary west of the Antarctic Peninsula through closing a large area of ocean for whaling.

The outbreak of war in September 1939 brought an immediate reduction of whaling in the Antarctic, and, by 1941, complete suspension. The whale stocks, clearly seen to be declining, were given a respite. At the end of the war the new spirit of international cooperation provided opportunity for a comprehensive agreement that would conserve the whale stocks while restoring the industry. Thus in 1946 a new International Whaling Convention was born. The Convention set up the International Whaling Commission (IWC) which became, and still is the governing body of world whaling.

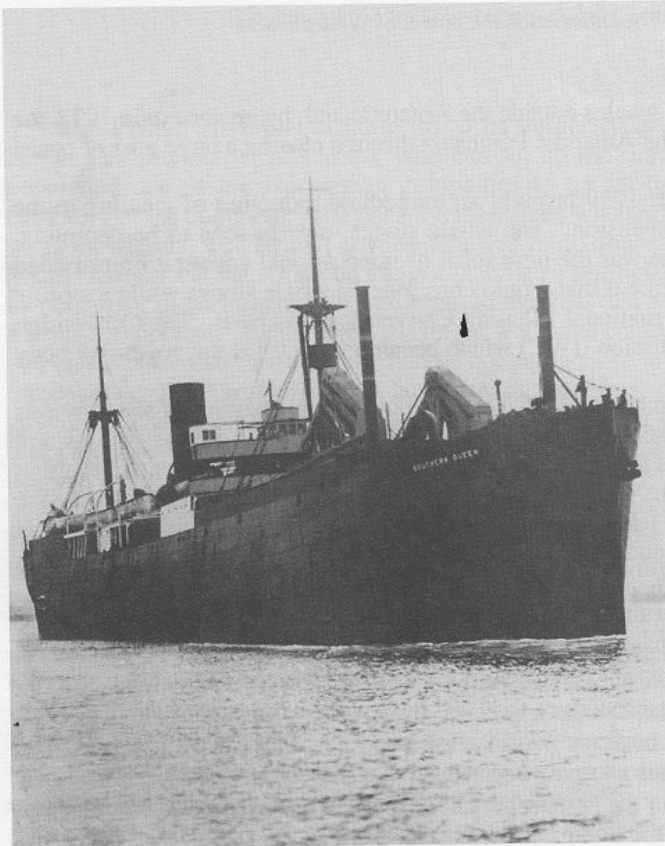
Much of what was initially agreed by the IWC followed closely the pattern of the previous conventions. It prescribed catching seasons, reaffirmed the bans on taking right whales and humpbacks, and set out minimum sizes for catching different species. Now however, for the first time in an international agreement, there was set a catch limit in the Antarctic, calculated to be the number of whales that could be safely taken without depleting the stocks. The initial figure was 16,000 blue whale units, equivalent to about 25,000 whales, a considerable reduction on the catch level of the immediate post-war seasons.

In the establishment of the convention and of the IWC the USA played a leading part, in line with its initiative on the United Nations. The distinguished American scientist, Dr. Remington Kellogg, chaired the meeting in Washington which set up the Convention, and as the US Commissioner he continued to be the guiding inspiration of the IWC in the following years. The USA had great weight in the IWC from both its power in world affairs and its complete detachment from whaling interests. It fell to the Americans on many occasions in the IWC's history to call the commissioners of the whaling countries from the narrow pursuit of their own whaling interests to some sense of idealism in the preservation of the living heritage of the world.

Apart from the USA, the initial membership of the Convention was comprised almost entirely of whaling countries. The Antarctic whaling countries, Norway, UK, South Africa, the USSR, Japan, and Holland, were supplemented by those who had whaling operations from land stations — Australia, Brazil, Canada, Denmark (Greenland), France (Congo), Iceland, and New Zealand. There were also Mexico, Panama, and Sweden, who had possible but not actual interest in whaling. There was regular attendance from FAO (the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations) and ICES (the International Council for Exploration of the Seas), both of which were interested in exploitation and conservation of marine resources. Notable for their absence from membership were Peru and Chile, who decided that they could control their coastal whaling more satisfactorily on their own than through the IWC. As will be seen, they took independent action a few years later in a spectacular way.

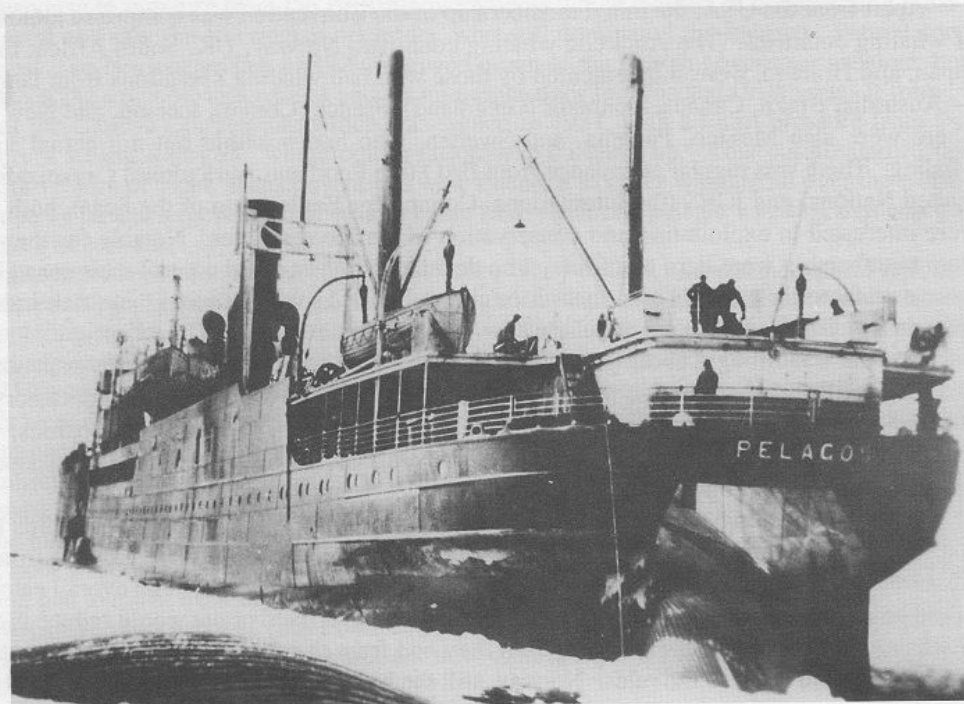
The war had brought about great changes in the whaling picture. Germany was out, but the Russians and Dutch had entered the game, the former with an ex-German floating factory, a prize of war. Japan also resumed its operations. The British and Norwegian companies, who had found the Japanese determined and unscrupulous competitors, tried to get them ostracised like the Germans, but General MacArthur was persuaded to let them continue in the industry.

The established whaling companies, rebuilding their fleets after most of the ships had been lost on war service, were anxious that the total Antarctic fleet should be limited to avoid the pressure on whale stocks that was so evident in the last pre-war decade. The overall catch ceiling would help, but too large a catching fleet operating within a fixed quota would reduce the number of whales available to each expedition, and they had from the start doubts on whether the USSR and Japan would observe the rules. Norway, still the biggest operator, tried to set a good example



The Salvesen Company's floating-factory whaleship *Southern Queen*, 8,100 tons, leaving the Smith's Dock Company shipyard on the River Tees at Middlesbrough (England), for a whaling cruise to the South Shetlands and Antarctica. Salvesen and other British expeditions typically carried a compliment of British officers and technicians with a mostly Norwegian crew — including such essential specialists as flensers and gunners. [Kendall Whaling Museum archival photo, undated. The vessel was built in 1902 and was in service through the 1920s.]

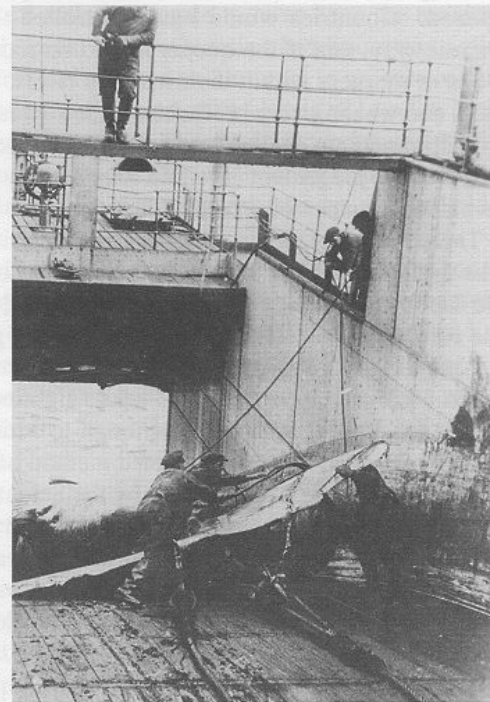
The floating-factory *Pelagos*, flagship of a whaling company of the same name in the 1920s, was a converted from a White Star ocean liner originally named *Athenic*, built in Belfast in 1901. The stern slipway is clearly visible in the photo, with one rorqual being hauled aboard to the flensing deck — the “plan” — and others waiting alongside. [Kendall Whaling Museum archival photo, undated, circa 1927-28.]





Cutting-in alongside, the old fashioned way, was always treacherous, particularly when the stormy Antarctic waters were choppy and laden with ice. Safety and convenience were much improved with the introduction of the stern slipway (see below). Shown here: Norwegian floating factory *Thors-hammer*, circa 1923. [Kendall Whaling Museum archival photo.]

The stern slipway — a ramp beneath the stern transom — was introduced on Norwegian ships in the 1920s and before long became a common feature on floating-factories of all nationalities. The ramp enabled the entire carcass to be hauled up onto the flensing deck, called the *plan*, improving safety and convenience for the crew and also enhancing efficiency, with less loss of the product. Photo from H.T. Wilkins, © Bryns Photo, Sandefjord, Norway. [Kendall Whaling Museum archival photo.]



A hauling-up appliance was invented by Anton Gjelstad of Sandefjord, Norway in 1931. Before it was introduced, a couple of men had to go down into the bottom of the steep slipway and fasten a line to the whale. This was difficult and dangerous; but the Gjelstad claw could be maneuvered mechanically with cables and winches; it also fit the flukes more securely, reducing chafing, slippage, and possible injury. A claw in the museum collection from a whaling station on South Georgia is 11 feet 9 inches (3.6 meters) long and weighs 2.03 tons (4060 lbs = 1842 kilograms).. [Kendall Whaling Museum archival photo.]

by restricting the replacement of its pre-war fleets. But there was no provision in the Convention for limiting catching power, nor was it in tune with American ideals of free trade and competition that Antarctic whaling should become an exclusive club. All that could be done, if diplomatic representation and discouragement failed, was to accept the new countries and try to ensure that they worked within the IWC regime.

The principle of free competition within a fixed quota, with every expedition free to get the biggest catch it could, and the catching season ending immediately the quota was reached, seemed simple and fair. But the whalers, if not their governments, quickly saw its grave economic defects. As more expeditions joined the Antarctic fleet and efficiency increased, the total quota would be caught quicker and the season progressively shortened. A fleet of perhaps twice the required capacity would then be operating quite uneconomically for a few weeks to fish the quota, and eventually everyone would go bankrupt. At that stage reduction of the total catch level to ensure conservation would be strongly resisted by the operators, already barely able to hang on. If national quotas could have been agreed in the early years of the IWC none of that would have happened. Countries would have controlled their expansion to take their quotas in the most economic way, and if the quotas had to be reduced for conservation they could have arranged lay-ups or mergers within their national fleets. In the late 1940s however, with the IWC newly minted, and whaling very profitable, these sophisticated thoughts were some distance in the future.

The immediate challenges to the IWC were, firstly, the fixing of a catch quota which represented the best judgement of whale scientists on the sustainable catch, and, secondly, ensuring that the whaling countries observed the regulations.

There had been plenty of work done by British and Norwegian scientists on Antarctic whale stocks in the 1930s but their conclusions had been very tentative. All they knew, as everyone could see from the catch figures, was that the blue whales, preferred for their size, were reducing in the catch relative to fin whales, indicating a growing scarcity, and that greater catching effort was not taking more whales. Professor Mackintosh of the National Oceanographic Institute had initiated some primitive counts of whale sightings from the British government survey ships, but evidence from these was hardly enough to satisfy governments and whalers. Until the middle 1950s there was not even an accepted method of telling the age of whales, an essential element in population dynamics. So the pleas by the Scientific Committee of the IWC that the initial 16,000 unit quota was too high and should be cut had a rough reception in the plenary sessions of the IWC. The quota was first reduced nine years after the regime started, and then only to 15,500 units. Later, in 1957, it came down for two years to 14,500, but that was only 10% below its initial level and was far from reflecting the decline in stocks that had taken place during the intervening years.

A regime of free fishing within an overall quota would clearly only work if everyone obeyed the rules. If any participant failed to report his catch correctly the season would be ended with too few or too many whales caught, and if he ignored the season or size limits he would take whales dishonestly at the expense of the other operators. From the earliest days of the IWC there were grave suspicions that the Russians, and to a lesser extent the Japanese, were breaking the Convention, taking undersized whales or protected species, fishing outside the season, and over-reporting their catch so that the season was shortened and they could be left to whale on their own after everyone else had gone home. The Russians were caught at this on several occasions and were reported to the IWC, which investigated the alleged infractions. Nothing, of course, could be done in the face of blank Russian denials, and the other governments were in any case not keen to stir up

a row which might push the USSR to walk out and resign from the Convention. But the bad faith of the Russians made the whaling companies sceptical about reductions in the quota. Why should they accept cuts in their catch if the whales they saved were simply to be taken illegally by the Russians?

A particular trial in the early years was the appearance of the shipowner Aristotle Onassis in the whaling industry with a fleet fitted out and manned in Germany, operating under several flags, including Panama. Panama was a member of the IWC but clearly at no time was prepared or able to exert any authority to control Onassis. His expedition *Olympic Challenger* ranged the Antarctic between 1950 and 1956, shooting anything that swam and at any time. The countries of the IWC were unable to do anything about this piracy, for which plenty of strong evidence was available, and the attempts of the British and Norwegian whalers to buy him out were rebuffed.

Eventually this successful life of crime came to an end. In 1955 *Olympic Challenger* was sent down to fish off the coast of South America before the main Antarctic season, mainly for sperm whales. Peru and Chile had just declared a 200-mile fishing limit, against all the precedents of international law, which were still based on the 3-mile limit, said to have been the maximum range of a cannon ball fired from the coast. The arrival of the Onassis expedition was a direct challenge to the government of Peru. The expedition was arrested and brought in to Paita, where it was detained until Onassis paid a \$3 million fine. He had insured with Lloyds of London against such an eventuality, so the incident gave him no immediate pain. The resultant worldwide publicity however, coupled with a lawsuit started by the Norwegian companies claiming compensation for damage to them from his illegal whaling, made him realise that the game was up, and he sold the expedition to Japan.

It is worth noting, as we pass that incident, that Peru's courageous example was soon followed by other countries, though it was resisted by the USA and Britain, traditionally champions of the Freedom of the Seas, to support their strong trade and defense interests. Extended sea limits for fishing have subsequently provided an important basis for the conservation of fish stocks.

The business of the IWC was not carried on purely as a debate between the Antarctic whaling countries with the USA as an independent mediator. The other members played a lively and important part. Their votes were needed to pass any resolution of the Commission, and they had their own interests to defend. The normal pattern was that the countries with land stations would vote in favour of catch limitation in the Antarctic but would be reluctant to accept the full Antarctic menu of regulations for their own stations. They argued that some of the size limits were inappropriate in the areas in which they fished; and that in regard to over-all catch control, land stations, each with a fixed radius of operation, were self-regulating. They were also far more vulnerable economically than floating factories, which could adjust their catching pattern to cope with new restrictions. On the whole, there was no direct conflict between the land station group and the Antarctic whaling countries, although the stations of Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa were harvesting from the same stocks.

There was one important clash of interest, over humpbacks. These had been protected in the Antarctic since 1938, but when Australian land stations started to catch them after the war, and it seemed that stocks had recovered, the Antarctic whalers claimed the right to fish them as well. The IWC refused to reserve them for the Australians and set a quota for the Antarctic which would still leave enough for their stations. Unfortunately, the Antarctic quota was often overfished and the humpbacks trekking off Australia diminished, finally being wiped out in a great illegal battue by the Russian factory ships in 1960/62. In general the attitude of the land station countries was that

the whales which came up and down their coasts were their property and should be reserved for them. The Antarctic whalers, against that, argued that the whales taken in warmer waters often yielded only half as much oil as the same whales taken in the course of their feeding season in the Antarctic, so it was grossly wasteful to catch them when they were so thin.

A comical aspect of the Commission's proceedings was the annual debate about indigenous catches, still I believe a feature of IWC proceedings. The right whale of the Arctic was now very rare and fully protected. But the Canadian Eskimos had always taken a few of those for oil and meat, so their privilege had to be preserved, in defiance of the high conservation principles of the Canadian government. The South Africans claimed that they too were feeding indigenous people with whale meat and should have similar concessions but they got no support.

The national delegates to the IWC—or commissioners, as they were called—were nearly all career civil servants of high calibre. The whaling companies were in attendance but were rarely allowed to speak in plenary sessions. The exception was the USSR, which had in its official delegation Captain A.N. Solyanik, the manager of its expedition *Slava*. Solyanik spoke with the authority of experience. It was difficult for scientists and government administrators to argue with him when he roundly declared that there were as many whales in the Antarctic as there always had been, even though they were convinced he was wrong. Solyanik was also a master in deadpan denials of gross infractions of the whaling regulations for which he personally had been responsible. Much of the active work of the IWC was done by the Americans and British. The Americans were strong in their determination to make the Commission work, while the British, who also provided the secretariat, had high professional standards and were adept drafters. We, as their industrial advisers, sometimes felt that they were too active in trying to create a common purpose for the Commission members and not as attentive as they might have been in defending their national whaling interest. It was however to their credit that they behaved like this. The IWC would have been more effective if all the other countries had been equally high-minded. Among our own [British] delegates was Ian Graham, a senior civil servant in the Fisheries Department, who provided the support of long experience to changing Fisheries Secretaries. Graham formulated his own Law of Fisheries Conservation, to the effect that no scheme for the protection of an endangered species ever becomes effective until after the last surviving member of that species has been eliminated.

The pressure to reduce the initial 16,000 units quota for conservation brought the whale sanctuary into question. That, as mentioned above, was established in 1938 for the area west of the Antarctic Peninsula, including the Bellingshausen Sea. At the time, there were believed to be few whales there so it was considered an empty conservationist gesture. But when the quota started to be reduced the whalers pressed their governments to reopen the sanctuary. There were no conservation grounds, they maintained, for keeping it closed, since the overall catch was fixed, and the opening of a new area would relieve the strain on the other fishing grounds. The scientists were not happy about a change. Dr. Mackintosh, the leading British scientist, believed that there was a danger that with intensive whaling whales could get so scarce that they would no longer meet to breed. A sanctuary allowed them to survive and multiply. However, the Commission did not accept his argument, and in 1955 the sanctuary was reopened concurrently with a reduction of the quota from 15,500 to 15,000 units.

It might have been expected that the whalers would pile in to the area to take advantage of this virgin fishing, but they did not do so, perhaps because it had so long been considered the empty quarter. My company was the only one to send its expeditions there in 1955/56, the first season of

opening. That decision gave our two expeditions almost the best catch they had ever had. Our chairman, Captain Harold Salvesen, who had enormous knowledge and experience of Antarctic whaling, judged that the whale stocks that had been fished from the west coast of the Antarctic Peninsula in the 1920s must still be there, and would have recovered after being left alone for twenty-five years. His courage paid off beyond all expectation. I was in the Antarctic myself that season and I well remember the excitement of sailing past the sunken crater harbour of Deception Island in the South Shetlands, the old home of whaling floating factories before ice fishing started, and reflecting that no whalers had been in those waters for a quarter of a century. "We were the first that ever burst into that silent sea." The opening of the sanctuary, whether or not sound in conservation terms, remained permanent till the end of whaling.

By the later 1950s it had become clear that the IWC in its existing form could not continue. Antarctic whale stocks continued to decline, but it was impossible to get agreement to bring the overall quota down to the much lower level recommended by the Scientific Committee. The Japanese were continuing to expand, though after 1956 only by buying existing Norwegian and British expeditions. Worst of all, the Russians had started on a building programme which would bring in three new expeditions, in addition to the elderly *Slava*, just at a time when the total Antarctic whaling effort needed to be scaled down in line with lower quotas and catches. The Norwegians and British saw that the IWC regime would soon squeeze them out of existence with declining stocks, more competition for the quota, and large-scale Russian cheating.

There came a ray of light in 1958, when the Norwegians proposed a new system of national quotas and the Russians, much to everyone's surprise, quickly agreed both to the principle and to a quota for themselves of 20% — far higher than justified for their one expedition, but perhaps not excessive for four. The remaining 80% was then to be divided by agreement among the other four whaling countries, Norway, Japan, Britain, and Holland. With the agreement signed by the USSR in late 1958 there was every hope that the four countries would quickly agree to quotas which could be introduced in the 1959/60 season. But it was not until three years later that a full quota agreement was finally adopted, too late to save the whales. Each government was determined to defend its own whaling interests, and no one was ready to make the quick compromise that was necessary to get agreement. The Norwegians and British come out quite well in a historical assessment. Both countries were well aware that the industry was on the edge of an abyss, and that only a national quota agreement gave some chance of stability and of the drastic reduction in overall catch that was required. The Japanese were less convinced that there was any danger; they were doing well themselves and were in no hurry to change the regime. The Dutch were the real stumbling block. Not only did they refuse to accept any evidence of stock decline, but they also stood out for a national quota far higher than could be justified on any basis.

The complex negotiations on quotas brought about at one point the temporary resignation of Norway and Holland from the IWC. The overall catch ceiling then had to be abandoned and the whaling nations set individual catch quotas. So for three seasons, when the overall quota should have been going down, it went up from 15,000 to nearly 18,000 units, virtually a reversion to free fishing. By the time a quota agreement was finally reached for 1962/63, and the catch ceiling was reaffirmed at 15,000 units, whale stocks had declined drastically. That was shown most strikingly in a reduction of nearly 50% in the catch per whalecatcher between 1958/59 and 1962/63.

Alongside the quota negotiations, and linked with them, the whaling countries tried to bring in an International Observer Scheme, which would put observers of different nationalities on whaling factory ships to ensure compliance with the IWC regulations. This was opposed by the USSR,

not unexpectedly, but in 1963 the Soviets apparently switched their view and invited the other four whaling countries to Moscow to discuss and sign an agreement. I attended as industrial adviser to the British government. An agreement was signed and we took it home in triumph. But the USSR, by raising a series of technical objections, managed to delay its implementation till 1972, nine years later, by which time whaling had virtually finished.

In 1960 the IWC had set up a Committee of Three expert marine scientists to investigate thoroughly the stock position. Using the best mathematical techniques, and assisted by newly developed computer power, it came back in 1963 with an authoritative and bleak report. Blue whales could not tolerate further catching, and the sustainable catch of fins was only 3,500 units. This made it quite clear that Antarctic whaling was doomed and that only an immediate and total ban on catching the larger whales could allow stocks to recover to anything like their previous abundance.

The Committee of Three's report was of great importance. Several of the whaling countries had fought against drastic catch restrictions on the grounds that the evidence produced by the Scientific Committee of stock decline was inadequate, and they had conveniently enlisted the support of their own scientists for that view. Now it was no longer possible to hold this line and they were forced to face reality. The report of the Committee of Three changed the whole tone of the IWC, though of course it came too late to save whaling. It also established the central importance of stock assessment in fisheries management, and its methods have since been developed fruitfully by FAR and national fisheries bodies for assessing fish stocks.

I think of the year 1963, the year of the Committee of Three report, as marking the end of Antarctic whaling, partly because my company got out then, selling our remaining interests to Japan. The industry did stagger on for some years after that, with the catch ceiling progressively brought down, though never sufficiently to protect the remaining stocks. Fishing for blue whales was banned completely in 1965, for fins in 1976, and sei in 1978. After that there was no Antarctic whaling except for the small and still abundant minke. The IWC remains in being, though more as a forum for pressure groups seeking a complete ban on whaling on philosophical grounds rather than as the regulatory body for whaling as it was set up to be.

This account of the last years of the IWC and the industry reads like a Greek tragedy in which the protagonists move inexorably to their doom. But I do not think the outcome was inevitable. The IWC had many shortcomings. It could only move by consensus, since any country that disagreed with any of its decisions could protest and not be bound by it, or in extremity could resign and go its own way. The machinery of free competition within a fixed overall quota was misconceived and bound to lead to trouble. And the IWC could not deal with the bad faith of the USSR. Nevertheless there was a point, around 1958, when the adoption of a national quota agreement could have encouraged the nations concerned to take conservation seriously and plan to reduce the overall catch limits and their own fleets substantially to safeguard the future. We must all share responsibility for the collapse, but if a hierarchy of guilt were set up I would blame, next to the Russians, who never accepted either conservation or international cooperation, the Dutch, whose perverseness, both political and scientific, may just have tipped the balance between success and failure.

The IWC should not be condemned as a total failure. It did provide protection for the right whale, humpback, and Californian grey whale, which otherwise might have disappeared completely. Its provisions on length of season, minimum sizes for whales taken, and use of floating factories outside the Antarctic, certainly kept a brake on catching and enabled it to continue longer

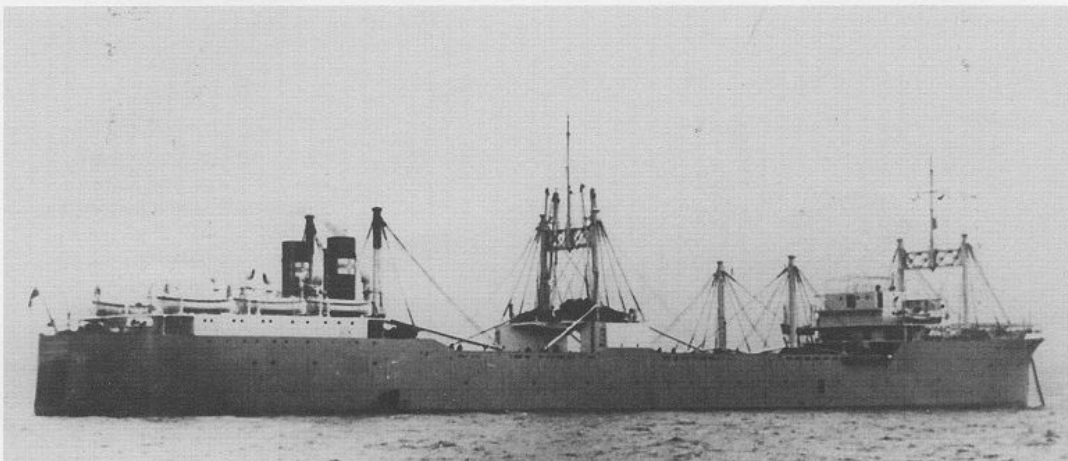
Whaling 1937-1967: The International Control of Whale Stocks

than it would have if there had been no regime. Its collection of statistics, carried out by a bureau in Norway, provided invaluable information to those who were trying to assess the health of the world whale populations. In latter days it has been criticized for not being effective in banning whaling completely, not on conservation but on broad environmental grounds. The IWC was however set up to regulate catch, not to stop it. It did show some interest in the promotion of more humane methods of killing the whale than the standard harpoon and explosive grenade. But the issue of whether whales should be killed at all, which presently dominates the IWC, was scarcely raised from either inside or outside the Commission. The last thirty years have seen the policies of many national governments developing away from support of their whaling interests to downright opposition to any form of whaling. Those who have lost their whaling interests, like Britain, have been more agile in this about-face than those who still have a whaling industry to support. The Norwegians, very sound on conservation, still support, if reluctantly, the right of their whalers to take minke whales in North Norway.

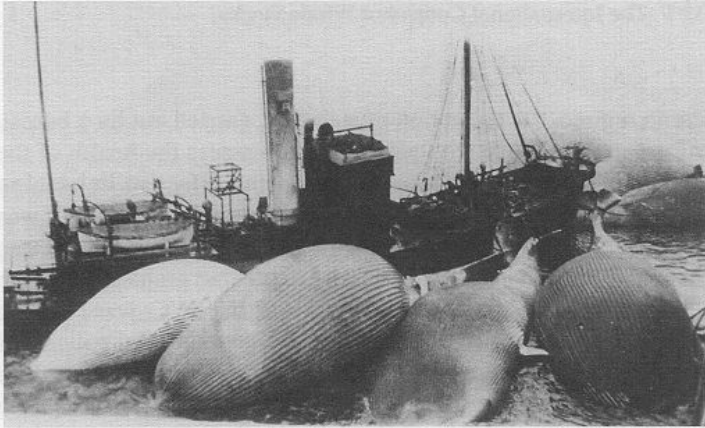
There are some lessons to be learned from the history of the IWC which apply to the problems of fishing control with which we are struggling a generation later. Its experience has shown that it is virtually impossible to control the exploitation of marine resources when they are common property. If whales or fish are made freely available to everyone they will be fished to the point of economic extinction because no one will have any interest in preserving them. So governments must step in to restrict catches for the welfare of present and future generations. A government can only do that effectively if it controls the ocean areas by extended sea limits of sovereignty or if it can negotiate national quotas in ocean areas which fall outside national control. As common land had to be converted to private property to stop its grazing from being reduced to dust, so must fisheries become the property of institutions with the authority to control and harvest them. An international body which retains the resources as common property and has no power to restrict or police their exploitation is doomed to fail.

I hope that we shall be wiser in the future.

Sir Gerald Elliot
19 October 1996

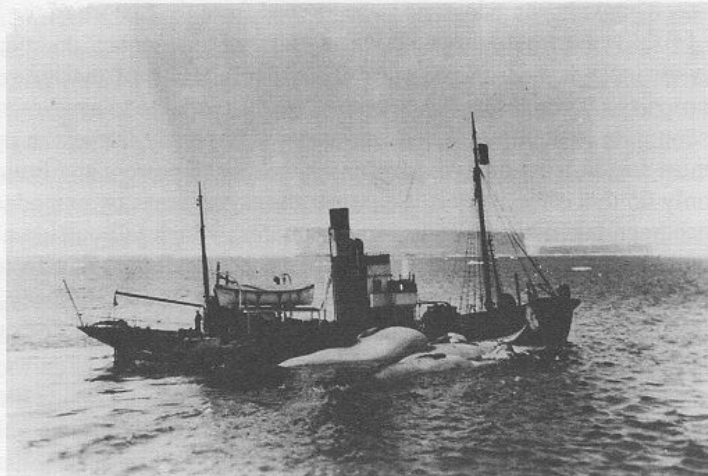


Kosmos, built at Belfast, Ireland in 1929: the world's largest floating-factory whaleship at the time — nearly as large as the liner *Mauritania* — fitted with a stern slipway. Photo by W.H. Humble, 1929. [Kendall Whaling Museum archive.]



Hauken-class whale-catcher of circa 1926, towing rorquals back to the factory ship in High South Latitude. [Kendall Whaling Museum archival photo.]

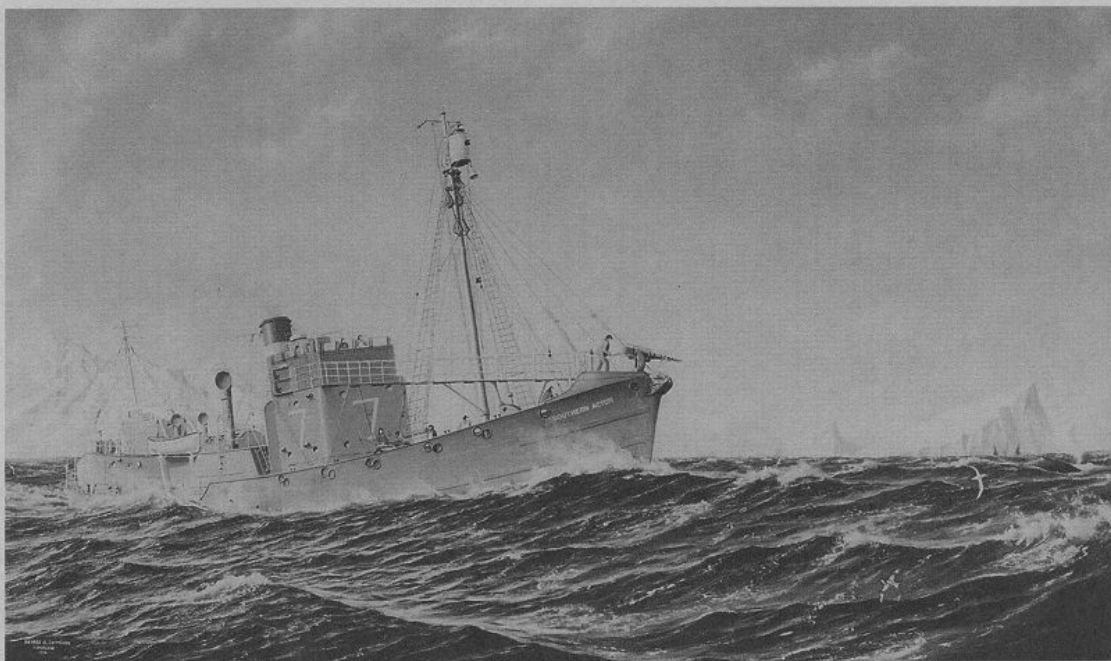
Southern Maid / Southern Princess-class whale-catcher of the Salvesen fleet, towing rorquals back to the factory ship in High South Latitude, 1920s. (Note characteristic Antarctic iceberg in background). [Kendall Whaling Museum archival photo.]



Whale-catcher Southern Truce, typical of the postwar Salvesen catchers; built at Middlesbrough (England) in 1945, in service in Antarctica for Salvesen until 1963, afterwards in Norwegian registry, converted to a cargo vessel and renamed in 1967, later lengthened and renamed four more times. [Kendall Whaling Museum archival photo.]



Whale Factory-Ship Southern Venturer at Leith Harbour, South Georgia, 1957-58, by ex Salvesen whaler George R. Cummings of Edinburgh (Scotland), 1995. *Southern Venturer* (14,493 gross tons, 20,310 dwt tons), depicted at Coronda Pier with three Salvesen catcher-boats and Coronda Peak in the background, was built for Salvesen by the Furness Shipbuilding Co. of Haverton Hill (England) in 1945; a helicopter deck was afterwards erected on her stern (visible on the aft superstructure) and a larger 9,000 hp engine installed. The vessel remained in service for the duration of Salvesen whaling operations and was finally sold off in 1962. Oil on canvas, 20 x 30 inches (50.8 x 76.2 cm). #O-504. [Kendall Whaling Museum photo by Mark Sexton.]



Whale-Catcher Boat Southern Actor on the Whaling Grounds Off Cooper Island, South Georgia, 1957-58, by ex Salvesen whaler George R. Cummings, 1995. *Southern Actor*, 439 gross tons (1800 hp), was built by Smith's Dock, Middlesbrough (England) in 1950 and remained in the Salvesen fleet until 1964, later saw whaling service in Spanish registry in the 1970s, and has been restored as a museum ship at the Christensens Whaling Museum in Sandefjord, Norway. Oil on canvas, 20 x 30 inches (50.8 x 76.2 cm). #O-505. [Kendall Whaling Museum photo by Mark Sexton.]

