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Comment

Save a seal and help save a sea

"It would be tempting to ascribe the terms 'endangered' or 'threatened' to the Mediterranean monk seal, but these are terms of overuse and hence liable to be read and passed by. *Monachus monachus* because of its scattered distribution, persecution and competition with man's space and food is dying." These are the words of Professor Keith Ronald, chairman of IUCN's Seal Group and chief organizer of the monk seal meeting in Rhodes.

There is an ancient saying—As the monk seal goes, man goes. A poetic exaggeration in past times, maybe, but today it rings disquietingly true. The monk seal is dying and the Mediterranean is sick. Both seal and sea can be saved—given the will. But does the will exist?

Last January the countries of the Mediterranean met in Monaco to agree the next vital stage of UNEP's Action Plan for the region—the adoption of a protocol to reduce the huge outpouring of those land-based pollutants which are threatening to choke the Mediterranean. While some progress was made on other matters, the meeting ended without agreement on this all-important issue.

Where attempts to save the Mediterranean have (at least for the time being) run aground on the rocks of politics and cost, what is the hope—indeed what is the point—in trying to save just one Mediterranean species? The answer is that the Action Plan to save the monk seal is intended to be very much more than just that.

The species in its present plight embodies, gives concrete shape to, the chief causes of Mediterranean Sea-sickness—pollution, overfishing, destruction of habitat. In short, the Mediterranean monk seal is a ready-made symbol of the Mediterranean itself.

To save an entire sea may seem too daunting a task to embark on. And too abstract a concept to grasp. But to save a hard-pressed sea mammal—and by so doing to help to save the sea it swims in—that is not an extravagant idea. It is a

(Continued on page 31)

Measures to save the Mediterranean monk seal

The principal problem is loss of suitable habitat. The principal requirement is therefore an international network of reserves.

Governments must assist by (a) establishing core reserves as breeding sites (open beaches as well as caves); (b) enacting and enforcing protective legislation (in most countries the species is still unprotected); (c) supplying trained staff at all levels. Senior policy makers must be advised accordingly.

Public co-operation is essential, especially from fishermen who in some regions still kill the seal as a competitor for fish. Intensive education efforts must therefore be mounted—and the feasibility of compensating fishermen for damage done to gear by seals should be investigated.

Extreme pollution from toxic chemicals and oil must be halted. Research on grey and common seals suggests that pollutants may reduce birthrates.

Visits by tourists to monk seal breeding areas must be controlled. So too must fishing in these areas. Disturbance is particularly harmful during the pupping and suckling period.

Monk seal orphans and casualties must be rescued, cared for and then returned to the sea. The Greek government and Guelph University have both offered to help in this work.

Population levels and trends must be determined, breeding levels compared and the causes of success or failure investigated.

Monk seal Action Plan agreed

Help is at hand for the Mediterranean monk seal. An Action Plan to save this embattled species was approved last month in Rhodes at a meeting convened by the Greek government and co-sponsored by Greece, UNEP, IUCN and the University of Guelph, Canada.

Attended by 61 delegates from 22 countries the meeting heard from experts from many lands and agreed on wide-ranging proposals to reverse the present drift to extinction. The proceedings of the conference will be published by UNEP.

In tiny colonies scattered over a huge area—from the Black Sea westward to the Atlantic coast of Africa—the species maintains its precarious hold on life. Its entire population is 500-1000 (the best estimate is 600) and throughout its range it is almost everywhere in decline. Only outside the Mediterranean in Mauritania does there seem to be some recovery.

The chief causes of the monk seal's present plight are: loss of habitat, killing by fishermen, disturbance by tourists, pollution. Only concerted action over a prolonged period—but beginning now—can save it. The agreed measures (see above) must now be implemented.

The Action Plan will be coordinated with monk seal projects in Turkey and the West Mediterranean (see January/February *Bulletin*, page 8 and 9), and also with efforts to save other species and

habitats. The monk seal will help provide the impetus for IUCN's Mediterranean programme as a whole. For example, projects for the conservation of coastal wetlands in Tunisia, Italy and Greece, and survey of marine turtles on the coasts of Turkey and elsewhere are about to start. Tunisia and Italy still have a few monk seals, while Greek and Turkish waters are the last stronghold of the species.

In Mauritania action already—in Greece shortly

On 8 June the Banc d'Arguin National Park was inaugurated by the President of Mauritania. At the same time the two main monk seal colonies on the Mauritanian coast were placed under the administration of the Director of the national park, Dr. Bal Mohamed El Habib. From Mauritania comes the further good news that the monk seal population is increasing. There are now about 60 animals there as against 30-35 in 1973.

Greece is about to establish a national park in the northern Sporades, an important centre for the monk seal in the Aegean. Greece is also producing a poster on monk seal conservation which will be made available to other countries.

Monk seal myths and stories— see back page

Whaling: Japan presents its case

In advance of the annual meetings of the International Whaling Commission, the Japan Whaling Association has put out a paper entitled *The Whaling Controversy: Japan's Position and Proposals*.

Japan's position is that

- the country now has only one whaling fleet where it formerly had three;
- as a result of whaling, a traditional part of the Japanese diet, now has to be imported from other whaling nations;**
- 200,000 people are nevertheless still employed in the whaling industry.

Japan proposes that

- non-member whaling nations (as against non-member non-whaling nations) be urged to join the IWC;
- whaling quotas be set on a 3-year basis to give stability to the whaling industry. The quotas would be subject to annual adjustments within set limits that would exclude the reclassifying of stocks.

Sincerity not in doubt—but

The Japanese wish for a "peaceful and realistic settlement of the whaling question ... a new dialogue based on mutual understanding and cooperation instead of confrontation".

There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of the Japanese. They are very conscious that in many parts of the world their whaling activities give them a bad press—particularly at this time of the year when the annual IWC meeting comes round. They also believe that this bad press is quite unjustified—and stems from a basic misunderstanding of the Japanese position.

Unfortunately the Japanese want contradictory things. They want cooperation, friendship, understanding, and "full scientific deliberations based on an objective attitude". So far fine. No conservationist could ask fairer than that.

But the Japanese are also very conscious of the needs of the whaling industry and of

the fact that home supplies of whalemeat are only 9% of what they were at their peak. The Japan Whaling Association is therefore adamant that "Japan cannot retreat any further with respect to the scale of whaling". In other words there must be no further cuts in whaling quotas. "We are confident" the Association says "that whaling on this one-fleet scale will not cause any decline in resources."

Being "confident" is one thing, being "scientific" is another. A great many marine biologists believe that even the present quotas, though appreciably lower than a few years ago, are still too high.

A curious line of reasoning

Science is concerned with facts, relevant facts. Extraneous considerations should be disregarded. Very curiously the Japan Whaling Association chides the Scientific Committee for, in effect, being scientific. The Association's paper says: "Disregarding the situation of the whaling industries, some anti-whaling scientists on

(Continued on back page)

Whaling: members urged to press IUCN position

On 17 May the following letter was sent by the Director General to all IUCN member organizations in States represented in the IWC. The letter urges members to press their national delegations at this year's IWC meeting in London to give full support to IUCN's position on commercial whaling.

For the past six years IUCN has called for a 10-year moratorium on all commercial whaling through its observer to meetings of the International Whaling Commission. To call for a moratorium is not contrary to the view that populations of whales are renewable natural resources which may be used under controlled conditions and within strict limits to provide food and necessary commodities for mankind. Rather it is an expression of lack of confidence in the present scientific basis of management for sustainable use and in the international machinery for implementing such use and for improving the scientific basis.

The policy has been sustained even while IUCN has given a cautious welcome to the so-called "New Management Policy" (NMP) adopted by the IWC nearly three years ago. This has been fully justified by continuing uncertainties in the science, the absence from the IWC of important whaling countries, slow progress in making even minimal revisions to the International Whaling Convention, and the fact that the International Decade of Cetacean Research proclaimed by IWC in 1973 is a mockery. As yet practically no funds have been devoted to implementing the International Decade by IWC members or by others. Furthermore, there is concern over some of the working arrangements in connection with whaling between IWC members and certain non-member whaling countries.

Since the NMP was declared, the inadequacies of scientific knowledge to enable its application have become quite clear: gross biases, uncertainties and mistakes in assessments are revealed at each meeting of the IWC Scientific Committee.

At the same time a new, unpredicted danger has emerged. IWC delegations wishing to see conservation policies enforced—even if they would prefer a moratorium—having accepted NMP as a political reality and perhaps as a compromise, find a need to commit themselves, even in advance, to act on recommendations of the Scientific Committee. This change was apparent at the special meeting of the Commission in Tokyo last December where, on the basis of questionable data and an unsatisfactory "model", a previous "conservative" decision was reversed. More stocks have been protected, but there is talk of again opening these stocks to exploitation on the basis of a purely hypothetical recovery in a short period of protection.

It is thus desirable for national bodies adhering to IUCN to consider what they, and we, might do to influence delegations to the IWC in a way that would ensure that the "New Management Policy" is changed in a direction more likely to enhance the conservation of whales.

Last year, for the first time, IUCN was represented at the IWC meetings by a scientist specialized in population dynamics and he was permitted, under the new rules of the IWC, to participate in the work of the Commission's Scientific Committee. As a result, IUCN has now a much better appreciation not only of the difficulties of the assessments that the NMP demands, but also of the extremely tenuous nature of

the data and the models used for such assessments.

In the light of these considerations I suggest that every possible effort should be made before the 1978 regular meeting of IWC to convince the National Commissions and their advisors that:

- 1) The long-standing moratorium policy of IUCN has been fully justified by recent events.
- 2) The New Management Policy must be applied this year in a more conservative way and drastically revised for application in 1979 and thereafter.
- 3) The proposed International Decade of Cetacean Research must be implemented without further delay.
- 4) The negotiation of the revised convention must be speeded up and the conservation provisions greatly strengthened.
- 5) In voting on quotas, the proposals by the Scientific Committee, whatever they may be, should be closely scrutinized, especially the extent to which they are based on scientific results. That is, it cannot be assumed that the scientists' proposals, as now calculated, are automatically "conservative" ones.

I should be glad to learn what actions you may propose to take in this connection and what, eventually, are the results of those actions. This will help us to prepare the position paper for our observers at this year's meeting at which IUCN will again be represented in the Scientific Committee as well as in Plenary Sessions. This paper will need to be ready by the end of May, so an early response would be appreciated.

David A. Munro
Director General

Law of the Sea—breakthrough, breakdown or just plodding on?

The Seventh Session of the UN Conference on the Law of the Sea adjourned on 19 May. "We did not achieve either consensus or what I would call a near consensus on a sufficient number of issues to justify a revision of the text" said Mr Amerasinghe, the President of the Conference. Proposals made and compromises reached will therefore be presented in a separate document.

Opinion among delegates was sharply divided as to whether UNCLOS III should reconvene this year or next. By a narrow majority (51 for, 46 against, 12 abstentions) it was decided that the present session will resume this year on 21 August in New York for a further 4-week period. But will all delegations turn up? Time will tell.

In the following article Professor Douglas Johnston analyses the prospects of the Conference. Douglas Johnston was the principal author of the IUCN Statement on the Law of the Sea and represented IUCN at the Geneva session of UNCLOS III.

The recent Geneva session of UNCLOS III is over. For environmentalists it could scarcely be viewed as an eventful session. Most governmental delegations are united at least in the determination to discourage interventions from the "outside". In a modest way the question whether it is now too late for such interventions to be useful was put to the test before the opening of the Geneva session when IUCN circulated a critique of the draft text to all foreign ministries and all delegations as well as to scores of interested organizations and individuals.

Of the 141 government delegations present at the Seventh Session only three—the United States, Canada and Portugal—came forward to express an interest in this critique, and the general explanation given was that it was too late to introduce substantive changes in jelled or jelling areas of the text. Even the organizational proposal put forward in the IUCN document was apparently perceived as provocative because of its potential substantive implications. Indeed a much more modest organizational proposal introduced into the Third Committee by the Soviet delegation late in the Seventh Session was criticized on similar grounds by a number of delegations, including some which were actually in favour of the Soviet proposal on its merits.

Optimists, pessimists and others

Given this display of scrupulous concern to preserve "the package", just how late in the day is it at UNCLOS III? What are the prospects for the Conference? From personal conversations with knowledgeable and experienced participants and observers, I discerned four schools of thought on these basic questions: the Optimists, the Pessimists, the Voluntarists and the Mechanists. None of them, of course, pretends to possess the gift of prophecy. But they lean in four quite distinguishable directions

which reflect at least three totally irreconcilable opinions.

Both the Optimists and Pessimists are issue-specific in their assessments of the Seventh Session. The Optimists are impressed above all by the progress achieved on unresolved issues of deep ocean mining. Accepting the orthodox view that these issues are the key to the success of the Conference, the Optimists now believe that UNCLOS III is on the brink of a "breakthrough". They argue that continued progress on these issues in the period between the Seventh and Eighth Sessions, and commensurate expediency by the Drafting Committee thereafter, would make it possible for the marathon Conference to be concluded at a signing ceremony in Caracas by the end of 1979, or at worst in the early months of 1980. This is a minority viewpoint, and one that may be confined to those most closely associated with developments in the First Committee.

The Pessimists, by sharp contrast, believe the game is up. This view is derived from an awareness of the distance that must still be travelled on crucial issues before a genuine (i. e. near-unanimous) consensus can be obtained on the entire text. The growing reluctance of some prominent governments to stay the distance and the financial difficulty or inability of others to do so are expected by the Pessimists to begin a process of erosion or outright withdrawal before the convening of the Eighth Session in 1979.

Scapegoat politics?

Members of this school of opinion doubt that intersessional progress could save the Conference from failure at this late stage. The United States and Latin America are seen as the most likely to disengage in 1978. According to this view, the Conference is about to enter the stage of "scapegoat politics", which dictates that disengagement must be carried out in such a way as not to invite universal condemnation for subverting the Conference in its eleventh hour. This strategy will no doubt produce reverse recriminations directed at others, such as the Soviet bloc, Third World militants, and perhaps the EEC, which may not choose to disengage overtly but may be accused of making major contributions to the difficulties and frustrations of UNCLOS III. This, too, is a minority view.

The Voluntarists are those who judge the matter by reference to the stock of willpower remaining at the leadership level almost regardless of the number and difficulty of issues remaining. The orthodox members of this school focus on the quantum of "political will" still present in the governments back home and judge that, on balance, the desire to have a treaty still prevails over the temptation to disinvest. It is conceded that Latin America and, to a lesser extent, Europe, may feel they have already attained their major objectives at UNCLOS III but will have to pause before accepting the political consequences of direct withdrawal.

A less orthodox branch of the Voluntarist school sees the matter in more personal terms and believes that the Seventh Session proved above all that virtually no crisis in the Conference can now deflect the determination of the President, the Committee Chairmen, and others to bring the Conference to a definite, albeit flawed, conclusion. This assumes that there is a critical mass of key participants who together furnish the motive power at the Conference, which they regard as their life's work and which, as a matter of personal pride, they simply cannot allow to fail.

Mechanistic view is popular

Finally, the Mechanists, like the Voluntarists, evaluate the prospects of UNCLOS III fairly positively, less by reference to progress achieved on specific issues than to the dynamics of the situation; but unlike the Voluntarists, the Mechanists argue from the premise of impersonal, institutional concepts such as "momentum", "atmosphere" and "the logic of alignment". The mechanistic interpretation seems especially popular, both among delegations and in the Secretariat, and would probably be the favourite among theorists of international relations, since it lends itself to abstract modes of analysis.

The Mechanists and Voluntarists are likely to agree, though for different reasons, that the Conference will persevere to the end, despite all the difficulties remaining. Many of both schools seem to anticipate the need for two or three more negotiating sessions before the signing ceremony in Caracas, probably no earlier than 1981.

Given the variety of prognostications—imminent success, imminent failure, and success after 1980—it is difficult to assert confidently what hope remains for any kind or degree of environmentally-related improvements in the text. Probably not much. But the work of environmental analysis and appraisal of the text should continue, because unless the Conference fails entirely, we shall all have to live with a seriously flawed convention.

Douglas Johnston

Comment (Continued)

(comparatively) small undertaking which gives the large one focus.

The monk seal occurs sporadically along thousands of miles of coastline. But almost everywhere its numbers are thin. A prerequisite for its survival is the protection of breeding areas through a network of marine reserves. The reserves will serve a variety of conservation purposes in a variety of lands, but all could gain impetus and cohesion by being pushed forward under the banner of a single species.

To adapt an ancient saying. If the monk seal goes, the sea goes. So the monk seal must not go.

Patrick Allen

Japan and whaling (Continued)

the Committee have a tendency to draw conclusions which lead to sharp reductions of whaling quotas." (The jibe about "anti-whaling scientists" is also a little curious. The data from which the Scientific Committee "draws conclusions" are largely provided by the whaling fleets—particularly Japan's. An anti-whaling bias does not seem very likely!)

Some dubious assertions

"In the 1970s whaling restrictions have grown to a level beyond what is necessary. Whale resources are thought by most of the world's marine scientists to be increasing." These assertions by the Japan Whaling Association are made in order to bolster the call for no further cuts in quotas. But of course the assertions themselves are highly dubious.

A great many reputable marine scientists (most?) would argue—and do argue—that whaling restrictions in the '70s, far from growing "to a level beyond what is necessary", have consistently and dangerously fallen short of the level that is necessary. And they hold this view because they think that whale resources, far from increasing, are decreasing.

The Association points out that "any further attempt to reduce whaling quotas will further disrupt the Japanese whaling industry". This statement must be accepted as true—and conservationists would agree that conservation measures which jeopardize the livelihood of 200,000 people are not lightly to be recommended.

But to contend, as the Association does, that "it is imperative we preserve whaling technology for future generations" is to argue for a back-to-front order of priorities.

Even from the singular standpoint of the industry, there is clearly a higher imperative. After all no whales, no whaling.

Non-whaling nations should join IWC too

The Japanese want more nations to join the IWC. So does IUCN. But the preference for whaling nations rather than non-whaling nations is more doubtful. Whales are a global resource. The many non-whaling nations of the world have as much right as the few whaling nations to determine a management policy. (Some people would also argue that the non-whaling nations are more likely to be objective.)

In calling for "joint study and research on whale resources", the Japanese say they are "ready to cooperate in implementing such research if concrete programmes are developed". Here there can be no quarrel with Japan's position. In 1973 the IWC announced an "international decade of cetacean research". That was five years ago. But a "concrete programme" has still to be formulated.

The Japanese also wish "to carefully review the accumulated data for setting more accurate and impartial quotas". Here again conservationists can have no quarrel—even if the two parties have very different ideas as to the likely result of such a review.

** The Japan Whaling Association states that 17% of Japan's whalemeat imports come from non-IWC whaling nations, such as Peru, South Korea and Spain, and admits that this practice contravenes resolutions passed by the IWC in June 1977. However the Association has appealed to the government to help stop these imports—and says that as a result they are decreasing.

CITES gains support in Japan

For the first time ever the Endangered Species Convention was discussed at the annual meeting in May of the Japanese Association of Zoological Gardens and Aquariums. The great majority of those attending the meeting said that Japan should ratify the Convention as soon as possible. A resolution to this effect has been submitted to the Japanese government.

The Association (which is a member of IUCN) has also said that after ratification it will help in providing customs authorities with identification manuals.

The IWC and Antarctica

The Antarctic Treaty powers are meeting in Buenos Aires in July to discuss the draft Convention on living resources in the Southern Ocean (for background see April *Bulletin*). But are management policies likely to be at odds with those of the IWC? A working group from IUCN's Interim Committee on Marine Mammals (ICMM) has been looking into this question.

Although labelled a conservation treaty, the Southern Ocean Convention is, in effect, a fisheries' treaty. Its prime purpose is to regulate fishing along sound conservation lines. The ICMM group states that in this respect the Convention marks a great step forward. For the first time, fishery management will attempt to relate harvesting not only to the population of the species concerned but also to interacting species. Most importantly this means whales.

While the draft Convention recognizes the need for cooperation with the IWC, a quite unusual degree of liaison will be required if management policies are not to conflict. The reason for this, of course, is that the whale's main food is krill, and krill is the main reason for the Southern Ocean Convention.

There is clearly tremendous need for caution in the new fishery and for continuous monitoring and exchange of information between the IWC and the new Commission that will be set up under the Convention. But even assuming the necessary coordination, management disputes could still arise.

The ICMM recommends that if such disputes do occur and prove irresolvable, they should be referred to a third party that is more widely representative than either of the two Commissions. It is essential that such disputes be settled. Otherwise it will always be the whales which suffer.

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Monk seal myths and stories

Fishing treaty. In West Africa the monk seal has signed a treaty with other animals so that all respect the fishing rights of each. **Grape robbers.** The monk seal, it is said, enters seaside vineyards at harvest time to pick and eat the grapes. There may be some truth to this tale. About 40 years ago damage to a French Mediterranean vineyard was attributed to wild boars—till seals were observed to be the culprits.

Gods and coins. In ancient Greece Apollo, god of the sun, and Poseidon, god of the sea, were both protectors of the monk seal. And it featured on ancient Greek and Phoenician coins.

Good luck—and sleep well. In (more modern) Greece to hang a seal skin outside the door kept away ill fortune, while a seal leg under the pillow was a cure for insomnia. **Easy child-birth.** Women in Sardinia wore seal-skin belts to make child-birth easier.

Taboo against killing. For fishermen from Algeria, Libya and (Black Sea) Turkey, killing the monk seal brings bad luck. One among many stories tells of

an Algerian fisherman striking a seal with his rod. For a year thereafter his livelihood was ruined—seals were always around his boat frightening the fish. **Weather-wise.** In Provence seal skins were used as barometers—and also to fend off lightning. **Deadly sin.** The priest in a Greek fishing village was recently persuaded to tell his people that killing the monk seal was a deadly sin.

Seals are a help—say fishermen

The population of grey seals on the island of Little Linga in the Orkneys has grown by about a third in the past two years. However the chairman of an animal protection trust insists that a cull is quite unnecessary and he intends to apply for an injunction against the Secretary of State for Scotland in order to prevent it.

He states: "There is no overcrowding and the fishermen say the seals are a positive help because they eat the squid which prey upon their lobsters."