

KILLING METHODS AND EQUIPMENT IN THE FAROESE PILOT WHALE HUNT

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(Translation from Danish*)

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Abstract

Pilot whales have been hunted for food in the Faroes since the early days of Norse settlement in the Viking age (800-900). Both the methods of hunting and the distribution of the catch are regulated by public authorities. Originally, regulations were primarily concerned with the collection by the authorities of a tax or tyfte from the catch. There were strict requirements that each boat and whaling bay was to be properly equipped with the suitable hunting equipment. The whale hunt today is in general carried out in the same way as it has always been done, but there have been significant improvements in the techniques used, as well as in the organisation of the drive and in the regulation of whaling locations. This paper describes the equipment used for driving and securing whales and for slaughtering. The equipment and methods are assessed in terms of current regulations and the results of analyses of killing efficiency are presented, and the extent of loss of wounded and dead whales is also mentioned. The paper also presents a brief overview of regulations and methods for the hunting of other small cetaceans in the Faroes. The hunt in general as well as procedures for the authorisation of whaling bays are described elsewhere.

Introduction

Archaeological evidence from the early Norse settlement of the Faroe Islands c. 1200 years ago, in the form of pilot whale bones found in household remains, indicates that the pilot whale, *Globicephala melas*, has long had a central place in the every day life of Faroe Islanders. The meat and blubber of the pilot whale has provided the islanders with an important part of their staple diet. The blubber, in particular, has been highly valued both as food and for processing into oil, which was used for lighting fuel and other purposes. Parts of the skin of pilot whales were also used for ropes and lines, while stomachs were used as floats, the oesophagus was used for shoes and the penis was dried and cut into strips which were used as sewing thread for skin shoes.