

**Norwegian minke whaling
Research to improve hunting and killing methods for minke whales in Norway 1981-2004**

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Current whaling practice

In Norway only one whale species is hunted, namely the minke whale. The hunt is conducted with small (50 feet) or medium sized (60-120 feet) fishing boats that are rigged for whaling in the spring and summer seasons. The hunting weapons consist of 50 mm and 60 mm harpoon guns with corresponding harpoons and rifles with full metal jacket, round nosed bullets of caliber 9.3, .375 and .458 (minimum caliber 9.3 mm) as back-up weapon. The harpoon is equipped with a penthrite grenade mounted on the harpoon tip. The current grenade was developed in 1997-1999 (Whale grenade-99) and is loaded with 30g pressed penthrite as explosive. A triggering device, a twin hook connected to the firing pin in the grenade with an elastic synthetic cord, triggers the detonation when the harpoon has travelled about 70 cm inside the whale body. The harpoon line, the line-runner, is made of elastic materials like nylon or other synthetic materials and runs through a spring system to a winch to haul the whale in to the boat after it has been shot.

During whaling the boats are usually searching for whales in known whaling grounds in a relatively slow speed (4-6 knots/h). If flocks of birds are spotted, the boat often waits there for some time as also whales might come and start feeding on the prey. It is not unusual that whales approaches the boat in such situations and is shot when it blows or the boat might lide up to the area where the whale is expected to blow. If the whale starts swimming from the boat it follow after the whale to get close enough to fire the harpoon. No sonar or similar instruments are used during the hunt as such instruments are regarded to scare the whales.

The whale is shot from the side whenever possible and the gunner will usually aim the harpoon at the thorax region. A minke whale which is hit deadaly as it rises to the surface to blow normally stops swimming, rolls on to its back, and floats for a short time before sinking. If it is deadly hit as it dives after blowing, it usually sinks without surfacing or pulls out some of the harpoon line before stopping. If the whale does not loose consciousness or die rapidly, it maintains its normal position in the water and dives actively and resurfaces to blow after some minutes. Therefore, if the whale does not immediately turn over on its back after being hit, or stops pulling out the line, it shall be hauled to the boat using the winch as fast as possible to check whether it is dead. The gunner will be ready to fire the back-up rifle when the whale comes to the boat. The rifle is usually fired at close range and when the whale's head is over water. The shot is directed to the brain. Many hunters fire a bullet in the brain as a matter of routine.

When the whale is lying at the boat side, a wire or rope is put around its tail before it is hauled on to the boat across the deck through an open gate in the garwale and butchered (flensed). The meat and blubber is put on crates on the deck and cooked before being stored on ice in the hull until it is brought to on land processing plants.

Training of gunners and monitoring of the hunt

From 1984 to 2005 all gunners and licence holders were obliged to attend obligatory courses where they were given a detailed instruction on grenade function, function of the safe and aiming