

# Point and Counterpoint - Makah Whaling

## Point - The Makah Whaling Proposal

article by C. Boysen, reprinted with permission from:  
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### *Under Treaty-Reserved Right*

## Makahs To Resume Whale Hunting

The Makah Tribe plans to resume its traditional hunting of gray whales under rights reserved by its treaty with the U.S. government. Once nearly hunted to extinction, northern gray whale populations have rebounded to historic levels.

Archeological investigations confirm that Makah people have hunted whales for at least 2,000 years. The United States government recognized the importance of whaling to the tribe when it signed the Treaty with the Makah in 1855. This treaty reserved to the tribe forever the right to hunt whales in the tribe's traditional hunting areas off the Pacific Coast.

The Makahs were forced to stop whaling after the decimation caused by European and American commercial whalers during the first few decades of this century. Gray whale stocks have been growing at about 3 percent per year and have reached a total of more than 21,000, according to the National Marine Fisheries Service and International Whaling Commission (IWC). In their first year of harvest (1996), the tribe plans to take up to five adult male gray whales for ceremonial and subsistence purposes. The Makah Tribe currently has no plans to conduct any commercial harvest of gray whales.

The upsurge of the gray whale population is an international success story as their populations have flourished under protection of the Endangered Species Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act and the IWC. The gray whale was removed from the endangered species list in 1994.

"In the spirit of cooperation, we are seeking IWC approval of our interim ceremonial and subsistence whaling activity to provide our members with the certainty that they can begin to exercise their treaty whaling rights on limited basis without legal impediment," said Makah Tribal Council Chairman Hubert Markishtum. "This in no way should be construed as a waiver or relinquishment of our treaty-secured whaling rights."

"The tribe was forced to suspend whaling. Now there is an opportunity to sustain balance, exercise our treaty right and revitalize part of our culture as well," - Dave Sones

The Makahs have always actively managed the salmon, halibut, groundfish, shellfish and marine mammal resources within their usual and accustomed fishing areas.

"We will be an active player to make sure the gray whale never goes back on the endangered species list," said Greene.

Beyond present management considerations, the cultural importance of restoring tribal whale hunting rights was underscored by Greene. "For the survival of our culture, our children today need to realize what our traditions are all about as far as whaling is concerned," said Greene.

"Whaling is the backbone of Makah society and culture - an activity the whole tribe came together on - all the families and villages worked as one - not to mention the importance of whales as a food source," said Greene.

"It gave me a sense of our identity. It will give our people a chance," said Makah tribal elder Charlie Peterson, 79. Peterson recalls his experiences with his grandfather, Chestoqua, who owned one of the last whaling canoes. He also speaks of his uncle, Jongie Claplanhoo, who owned one of the last sets of whaling gear. Peterson lives beside the creek that whalers once used to prepare themselves for the hunt. Preparation for the hunt is what he remembers most when he was a young man.

"We will be an active player to make sure the gray whale never goes back on the endangered species list." - Dan Greene

"You had to have your body in perfect shape and be mentally sharp - lot of praying. Everything was silent, to not frighten the whale away in the ocean current." Peterson said. "I'd like to see the hunt come back. It's second nature to our children - they need the chance to do it again."

"It is really an issue of balance that was understood by our elders with their knowledge of the whales, their life cycles, migration patterns, and habitat needs - not harvesting more than they needed so as to not impact populations said Makah Fisheries Enhancement Manager Dave Sones. "The tribe was part of that balance and understood and participated in that balance."

"The tribe was forced to suspend whaling. Now there is an opportunity to sustain balance, exercise our treaty right and revitalize part of our culture as well," said Sones.

## Counterpoint - A Response to the Makah Proposal

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### The Makah Whaling Dance

by William Rossiter

The Whaling Dance of the Makah Nation is really many dances, and if you care about whales you should study it carefully. The core dance is fascinating and traditional, with ancient words and rituals about the honor and need to whale with skin boats and stone lances; a core symbol for some of the traditional cultural values in this ancient society, now jeopardized from decades of erosion and change.

Around this core the Makah Tribal Council is in their sham dance, for they just want to kill five gray whales the modern way, perhaps becoming commercial whalers, and for some, enjoying the international attention the issue has brought. With an insular, autocratic ignorance, and decades of experience at being suspicious of Outsiders, the Tribal Council doesn't seem to be aware of the effect they are having, on their Nation and Outside. Or they don't care.

The next ring is a terrible whirl of social ostracisms and threats within the community, with those few Makah who demand a return to whaling going to cowardly and churlish lengths to silence those who oppose the whaling. Saddest of all is the impact of this on some Makah Elders and the traditional, respectful system centered on their wisdom, as the more modern, aggressive, but younger Makah work to destroy a millennium of cultural experience in the name of power. One Elder has been threatened with being taken off the tribal rolls if she continues to speak out, taking away her health care and tribal privileges, yet her ancestor signed the treaty that empowers the Council. Many Makah may not even know what's going on, or they are afraid to speak out. Many have no concept of the issue beyond Neah Bay, and the very probable economic loss of tourism if even one whale is killed. Only a few may profit from whaling, but all the Makah will suffer for it. This is not a threat of some organized boycott; who would want to visit a place that, for profit, kills the same whales that are revered by millions as they migrate along the West coast?

Outside this ring the Outsiders are dancing, with those who can benefit from the Makah whaling providing funds and persuasion to the flattered and selectively unsuspecting Tribal Council. To Norway and Japan the dance is about the Makah getting a quota from the IWC under a redefined or new category of aboriginal whaling, greatly expanding the opportunity for the

worldwide and wholesale slaughter of whales for profit. To the Clinton Administration the dance may be about concerns for many other Native American treaties, and potential legal and compensatory penalties; they certainly don't care about the whales or Native American traditions. That may account for the astonishing amount of taxpayers' money supporting Makah whaling, and may create another embarrassing performance at the IWC as the U.S. gives away to all sides, determined to do anything to get the Makah their whales.

The next ring is a giant swirl of the many nations, organizations and public who are opposed to the Makah whaling. We are all trying to reach the inner ring's core dance, for we all know that no whales need be killed to meet the Makah's needs. The Old Makah needed to whale to survive. Today's Makah do not. Even with an IWC quota they can regain all their whaling tradition and ritual, but just not kill any whales. Everyone but Japan and Norway would applaud that, and all the Makah would profit greatly. They need tribal pride, restored cultural values, and a greater independence from the impoverishing ways imposed on them from outside. They need a Tribal Council that will lead them to a secure future, not lock them in a continuing contest with nations and people all over the world. They deserve to restore and protect their culture, and display it proudly. To that end CSI is working with many other organizations in many ways. One is to promote whale watching and cultural tourism as a far better way to achieve some of what the Makah need. Another is a continuing effort to have the Tribal Council understand the implications of their actions within and beyond Neah Bay. Our goal is to simply stop Makah whaling before it starts. There is still time to prevent the dance from becoming a war.

If you want to become involved please express your views on this issue directly to: the Makah Tribal Council, Hubert Markishtum, Tribal Chairman, P.O. Box 115, Neah Bay, WA 98357, (360) 645-2201, and please tell us what you said.

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