Hand in #1: Conflict case description and stakeholder analysis

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Case Description

The conflict of whaling is an internationally discussed topic driven by environmental responsibility versus economic benefits and traditions. The main focus of this assignment is on the conflict of whaling in Iceland on a national level, which is still influenced by international pressure and laws. The conflict has been ongoing for many decades since the 18th century, when ethical concerns were raised, and not all Icelandic people stood behind the whaling industry. Back then, whaling and the market for whale meat was still a big part of the economy and many people lived directly and indirectly from the hunting of whales. Nowadays, the need for whale resources has decreased drastically, intensifying the conflict if the killing of whales can still be justified *(Gunnarsdóttir et al., 2010)*.

In 1986, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) issued a whaling ban (*Holt, 1999),* which the Icelandic government was able to avoid in 2002 by awarding its whalers a scientific quota. In 2006 commercial whaling continued with a low quota that has been rising until 2018 (*Hamaguchi, 2021*). Since then, the government has reconsidered its decision to whaling regularly, banning it and then allowing it again, based on protests from both conservation and ecotourism organisations and the whaling industry (*Hamaguchi, 2021)*.

In 2024, the whaling industry in Iceland was allowed to hunt 128 whales. The industry argues that whaling is crucial for the economy, provides essential resources, and holds significant cultural value. The opposing side states that nobody in Iceland relies on whale resources nowadays and that the economy, based on eco-tourism, would be stronger without whale hunting (*Bertulli, 2016)*. Supporting this, the conservation organisations stress the point of animal welfare and the consequences of whaling for the marine ecosystem and their contribution to stopping climate change (*Robkorhonen, 2024)*. Currently, the conflict is fought out by both sides putting pressure on the government to increase the quotas or to ban whaling in Iceland. In the new elections coming up in Iceland, the topic of whaling is hot since Halvur, the main whaling company, asked for an indefinite whaling permit that the current government has not yet processed (*McVeigh, 2024*).

The conflict will be accessed as a consultancy for the Icelandic government, evaluating the different arguments made by both sides and coming to a permanent solution for the conflict of whaling in Iceland. The concept of Walker and Daniels's progress triangle is used to

analyse the conflict. The progress triangle has three dimensions- substance, procedure and relationship through which the conflict can be addressed. This concept is used because improvements are required in the conflict to resolve it and it consists of progress (*Daniels & Walker, 2001, p.35*). Furthermore, the stakeholder analysis is performed to identify the interests and perspectives of the parties involved in this conflict.

Progress Triangle

Substance

The company, Hvalur hf., stands as the one in favour of hunting Whales, with the license from IWC to hunt 128 fin whales for the year 2024 (*IWC, 2024*). The country continues to hunt because of the economic benefits, as the meat is transported to Japan. According to a report for the Ministry of Fisheries, Food, and Agriculture of Iceland, in the last season, around 120 people were employed and were given an average salary of about $12,900 (*Iceland Review, 2023*). The whaling season of four months during summer has caught people's attention for its pay.

Iceland only exports whale meat to Japan and the meat consumption there has decreased from 233,000 tonnes in 1962 to only 1000 to 2000 tonnes last year (*Ciric, 2023*). Moreover, whale meat does not have a high demand as it's considered a delicacy in Japan and not a daily consumption food (*Statista, 2024*).

Whale hunting has been part of the Icelandic tradition since the 17th century, introduced by Basque hunters, but commercial whaling began in 1949. Iceland is one of the three countries that has been slow to outlaw this practice. Overall, whales have been an important part of Icelandic culture–earlier hunting was to survive the harsh weather, however, since the 1990s when whale-watching began, there has been a significant cultural shift in consumer attitudes.

The hunting of 128 fin whales generates revenue in the international market for around $20 million. A study by the Institute of Economic Studies found that 80 – 90 people could be directly employed from an annual catch of 150 fin whales which could generate circa US$ 10

million in total salary (*Cunningham, et. al., 2011*). These numbers show that whaling has created economic value for the country, making the government abolish the ban and allowing limited hunting of whales.

Procedure

The decision to continue whaling in Iceland has provoked strong reactions from both supporters and opponents, leading to ongoing discussions and rising tensions with each government decision. From 1948 to 1984, strict regulations were in place, indicating strong international recognition of commercial whaling. In 1982, the IWC implemented a global ban on commercial whaling, which faced objections from several countries. In response, the Icelandic government left the IWC in 1992. Two years later, Iceland adopted the Revised Management Procedure, a process developed by the IWC's Scientific Committee to estimate sustainable catch limits for commercial whaling of baleen whales (*IWC; Ministry-of-Industries-and-Innovation, 2014*).

The IWC proposed two major regulatory frameworks: The Moratorium and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Iceland currently holds reservations about both the commercial whaling moratorium and CITES along with its trading partners (Norway and Japan), thereby continuing whale hunting to this day. This led to the quantity of meat trade to be disproportionately greater than the constraints put by CITES (*Commercial Whaling*).

Iceland has now permitted the hunting of 128 whales for the 2024 hunting season (WDC). Even if the number of whales allowed to be hunted has decreased over the last few years a final national ban has not been established, creating more conflict between national and global perspectives.

The final decision on whaling activities involves key organisations and Iceland's government body. The IWC holds primary authority, however, they state "the IWC has not expressed a formal view on the issue of Iceland’s resumption of commercial whaling” (*IWC*).

On a national level, the Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Fisheries is responsible for issuing permits and setting whaling regulations. In recent debates in 2023, the Icelandic government attempted to implement a national ban on whaling, resulting in reactions from Hvalur hf (*Tómas, 2024)*. The whaling company applied for a five-year license in response to the Icelandic government's only issue of a one-year permit to bring in a middle way. Making this decision, some internal conflicts within the government as well as a favouritism side in the decision-making have arisen. It reflects how the authorities are still navigating their stance on the issue, which is most likely influenced by cultural reasons.

Various approaches have been introduced to address the issue in the past. Iceland claims that its hunting practices are science-based, sustainable, strictly managed, and aligned with international law, so the necessity of banning whaling has not been seen as an issue (*Ministry-of-Industries-and-Innovation, 2014*).

Given that the government has struggled to address specific issues effectively, involving a neutral, scientifically based organisation may be beneficial to guide the process. Additionally, seeking international assistance could provide valuable consultation to the government, helping them make informed choices for the future.

Relationships

The perspectives of both parties diverge when it comes to the understanding of the place whales occupy in the conflict. Pro-whaling communities see it as a food resource which can be collected, backing this assumption with the traditional culture of whaling in Iceland (*Brydon, 1996)*. Furthermore, the restriction on the quota of whale kills represents a constraint and a sense of compromise to them (*Brydon, 2006*). The conservationists and biologists on the other hand cannot be satisfied by defining the reduced number of kills as a sustainable practice. To them, whales are not a resource but living beings deserving recognition..serwlgh

The conflict between these two parties emerged as the contemporary international views on animal well-being collided with the cultural traditions of whale hunting in Iceland (*Brydon, 2006*). In 1980, the over-exploitation of commercial whaling led to a near-total ban

(*Handerson, 2020*). At the time, foreign environmentalists' revendications were characterised as overly emotional and irrational. Icelanders felt their sovereignty was threatened by their right to dispose of marine resources, which led to them positioning themselves against these international organisations (*Einarsson, 2009*).

If originally legitimised by anthropological arguments such as the local consumption of whale meat and cultural significance, the practice today inscribes itself in quite a different context. Whale hunting represents an industry but also an economic market. Through the reality of transnational capitalist consumption, the situation became much different from what it used to be (*Brydon, 2006)*. Icelandic whale meat has now reached an international market and does not only concern Icelandic consumers.

Criticised for his lack of decisiveness, the government's preferred outcome will favour a smooth and peaceful resolution of conflict (*Einarsson, 2009*). However, the divergence in interests between the two main parts renders a collaboration inconceivable. Pro-whaling and environmentalists both hold an important influence on financial interests in the confrontation. First, there's the economy of whale hunting linked to exportation, and on the other, there's the ecotourism economy depending on whale-watching (*Einarsson, 2009*). The whaling companies' main objective relies on profit. Whale hunting enables companies such as HB Grandi, or Eimskip to compete in the international economic market of whale meat. It is also important to take into account the employment such an economy provides for Icelanders, the fishing industry representing 7,6% of the workforce in 2005 (*Einarsson, 2009*). Eco-tourism sectors and companies hold just as many economic interests in the conflict. The whale-watching industry constitutes an important and growing part of the Icelandic tourist economy, bringing 104.000 whale-watching tourists a year, representing a yearly 12 million dollars (*Parsons & Rawles, 2003*).

This enabled a different economy and social structure for fishing villages, creating employment more sustainably. Amid Icelandic economic changes, the development of tourism appears as economic diversification. Whale-watching is seen as evidence of natural adaptation (*Einarsson, 2009)*. However, in a 2002 study, 79% of the whale watchers interviewed said they would boycott a country in which whales are still hunted (*Parsons & Rawles, 2003)*.

Such a conflict serves more purpose than one. It becomes compelling to see how such a situation can be used as a tool to raise international public awareness surrounding cetacean well-being while becoming a key symbol for the environmental movement. This led to nature conservation societies' campaigns regularly utilising whale imagery, anthropomorphising the characteristics of the mammal and changing the public perception of whales (*Einarsson, 2009).*

Stakeholder Analysis

The stakeholders are divided into three different categories: (1) the parties supportive of commercial whaling, (2) the parties against commercial whaling, and (3) the neutral parties.

(1) Pro-whaling	**(2) Anti-whaling**	**(3) Neutral**
- Hvalur hf - HB Grandi - Eimskip - High North Alliance (union) - Consumers	- Hvalavinir (environmental conservation organisation) - Greenpeace - Sea Shepherd Conservation Society - Icewhale (tourism association of Icelandic Whale watchers) - IWC (International Whaling Commission) - International Fund for Animal Welfare - Whales - Future generations	- Governmental authorities - MAST (The Icelandic Food and Veterinary Authority) - Local population - Scientific community - Media

Table 1 – Mapping the stakeholders

Under each category, the various stakeholders are classified as primary, secondary, and key stakeholders.

The primary stakeholders, meaning those which are directly affected by or have a direct impact on whaling (*Daniels & Walker, 2001*), are the whale hunting companies (Hvalur hf, HB Grandi), the umbrella organisation of fishing and whaling councils (union High North Alliance), the environmental and conservation organisations (Hvalavinir, Greenpeace, Sea Shepherd, the International Fund for Animal Welfare), the tourism association (Icewhale), the International Whaling Commission, and the Icelandic government, due to its direct involvement in policy-making. Lastly, the whales are stakeholders from an ecocentric and environmentally ethical perspective of stakeholder definition (*Friedman & Miles, 2006)*.

The secondary stakeholders, who have an indirect interest or influence on whaling (*Daniels & Walker, 2001*), are the research community, the media, the Icelandic population, the future generations, the consumers, and MAST.

Within these stakeholders, there are a few of which are the key ones, in other words, they are the stakeholders holding major influence in whaling practices (*Daniels & Walker, 2001)*. These are the governmental bodies, the whaling companies, the environmental and conservation groups, the whales, the IWC, MAST, and the tourism association.

Stakeholders' aims, status and interests

The whale hunting companies hold a status of power in pro-whaling activities. These include the owners and operators of whale hunting. They aim to continue and possibly expand whaling operations for economic gain and cultural preservation. The whaling union High North Alliance is composed of groups advocating for whaling interests, and they aim to promote whale hunting to protect jobs and cultural practices. The consumers influence the market demand for whale products and aim to access the whale meat.

The environmental and conservation groups hold a strong advocacy role in anti-whaling, aiming to stop whaling and to protect whale populations and marine ecosystems. Similarly, the tourism association, Icewhale, representing the ecotourism industry, promotes whale watching and therefore protection to boost tourism revenue, highlighting the economic importance of whale-watching. At the same time, the IWC ensures the conservation of whale populations by regulating whaling. While a unique ecocentric stakeholder, the whales aim to survive and maintain their well-being. The future generations aim to inherit a healthy marine environment and a sustainable ecosystem.

With its decision-making power, the government aims to balance pro- and anti-whaling parties while maintaining an international reputation and securing national economic stability. Within the government, MAST ensures regulatory compliance, therefore holding the status of regulatory authority.

The Icelandic population has a unique position as voters who can influence government policy, however, recent polling shows that while there is a decrease in whaling support, there is still a large portion of the population who are pro-whaling (*Fontaine, 2024)*. Therefore, the population status is that some support it for economic and cultural reasons, while others oppose it for ethical and conservation concerns.

Researchers have an advisory role aiming to research the practices of whaling to provide data-driven recommendations, holding an influential, however neutral, position. Lastly, the media reports whale hunting practices and news, having a public influence aiming to shape public perception.

The interests of the different stakeholder groups are illustrated in the table below:

Stakeholder groups	Economic	International image	Cultural history	Environment/ conservation	Scientific research	Legal compliance
Whaling companies	***	?*	***	*	**	***
Government	***	***	***	?	**	***
Environmental groups	*	*	*	***	**	***
Eco-tourism	***	***	**	***	**	**
IWC	*	**	*	***	**	***
MAST						
Population	**	**	***	**	*	*
Research community	**	*	*	**	***	**
Media	?*	***	**	?*	**	**
Whales	?	*	*	***	*	*
Future generations	**	*	**	***	*	*
Consumers	***	*	*	*	*	**

Table 2 – Importance key ***: Very important; **: Important; *: Less important; ?: Uncertain

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