

Some Whale Species in Danger of Extinction

By M. C. Cullen

CONSERVATION, pollution, man's impact on the environment, and the world's wildlife were all considered at the UN Conference on the Human Environment at Stockholm in June. The International Whaling Commission was asked to impose a 10-year ban on the hunting of whales. The whale had become at the conference the symbol of all the endangered species of wildlife in the world.

NEW ZEALAND has had a long history of whaling and in 1840 up to 500 men were employed in the industry. Whales can be considered to be native animals, as most of the whaling here has been from shore stations at sites all over New Zealand. The last three shore stations were at Whangamumu, Great Barrier Island, and Tory Channel.

Mr H. F. Cook, of Whangamumu, used a very ancient method to catch his humpback whales. A rope was slung between buoys where the whales were known to swim. Netting was suspended below and the whales were entangled to become easy prey. The harpooners struck from rowing boats. Catches were small, the largest annual one being 19 whales.

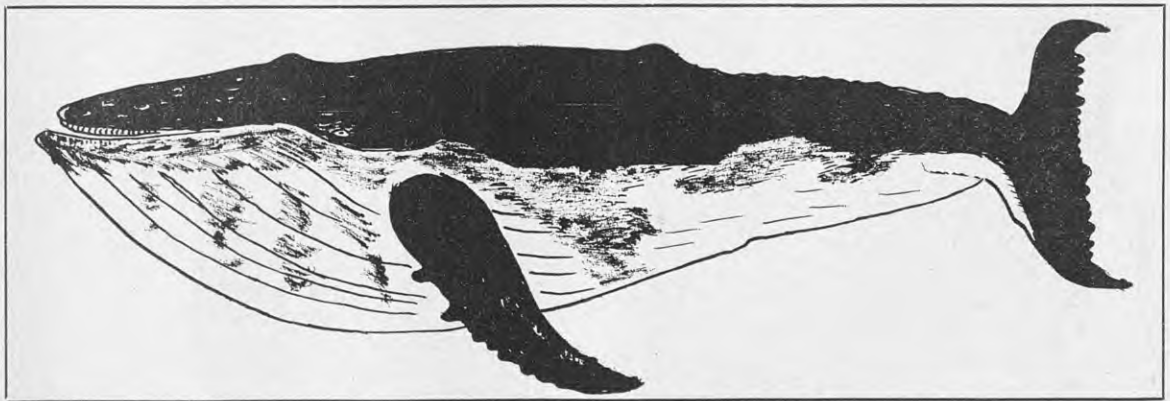
Mr J. Perano evolved a unique method of harpooning by gun which only stunned the animal. It was later killed with a 1½-lb explosive before it regained consciousness. He used fast motor boats capable of 20 knots and caught mainly bull humpbacks. The average catch was 94 whales a season, and

they were caught as they moved through Cook Strait from the Antarctic in winter.

Humpback the Main Species

The humpback whale has been the main species caught in New Zealand and was once the most important commercial whale. When the whalers moved to the Southern Hemisphere in the last century, the humpback and right whales were the first victims. Then, as whaling became more efficient with the invention of the harpoon gun, the blue, finback, and sei whales were caught and reduced to a remnant. The humpback was then caught again in the 1930s owing to the decline in blue whale numbers. In 1963 it became a totally protected whale.

The humpback is an ungainly creature in appearance, being very knobbly. Captain Scammon said in "The Marine Animals of the North-western Coast of North America" (1874) that it was "decidedly ugly". It reaches a length of about 50 ft and it is mainly black



The southern humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae lalandi*). It has very long flippers and is usually covered with barnacles.