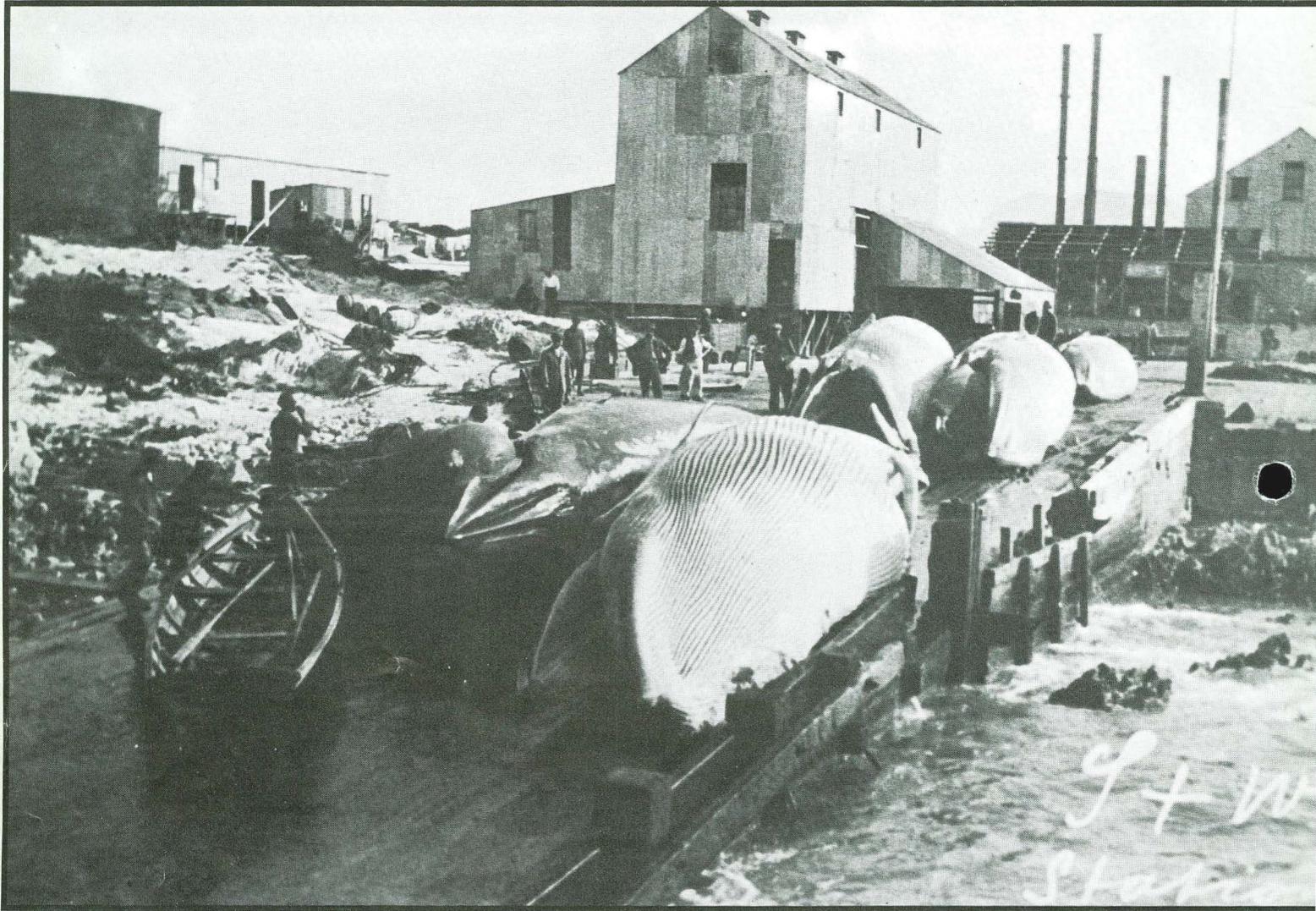




SAVING THE WHALES

Article: Coen Groenewald
Pictures: Die Burger; *Eastern Province Herald*;
Sea Fisheries Research Institute

1. A Greenland whale with her calf photographed in South African waters in 1981

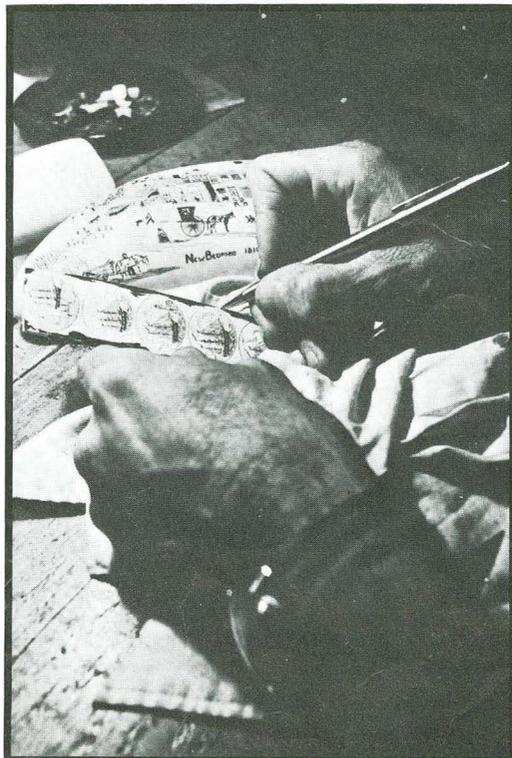


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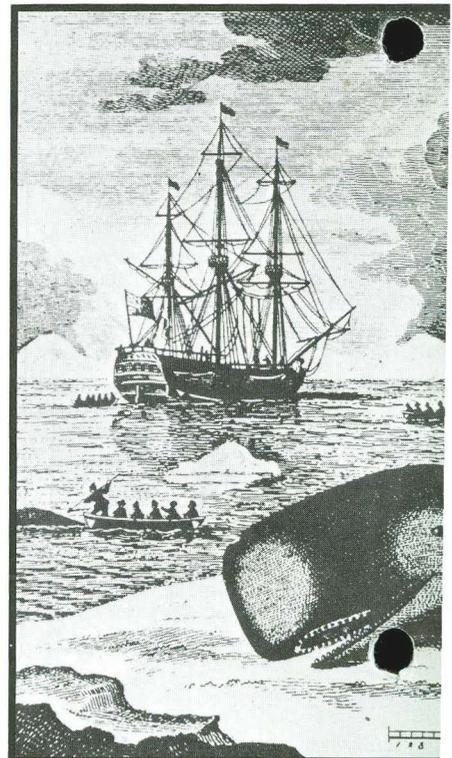
SOUTH AFRICA, a founder member of the International Whaling Commission, recently passed legislation protecting all whales within her 200-mile exclusive fisheries zone. Additional legislation severely limits the participation of South Africans in operations aimed at freezing and processing whale products. No factory ship, or any other type of vessel designed to kill and process whales, is allowed to operate within the protected water. No equipment may be provided to any whaling ship, and no one may offer his services to a whaler. Nor may anyone disturb whales during the breeding seasons over a period of six months a year. Disturb means that no aircraft or vessel may approach within 300 metres of a whale.

Over the last four years South Africa has also voluntarily contributed R78 000 to the IWC's research fund, more than any other member nation except the U.S.A.

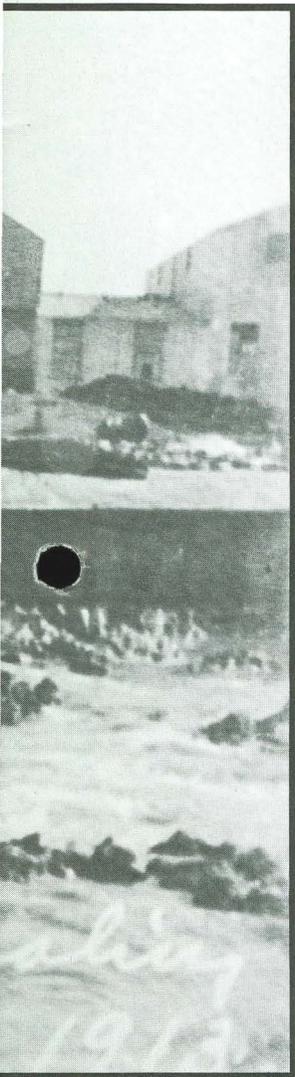
Some countries, including South Africa, feel that while individual nations may wish to stop or ban whaling for ethical or other con-



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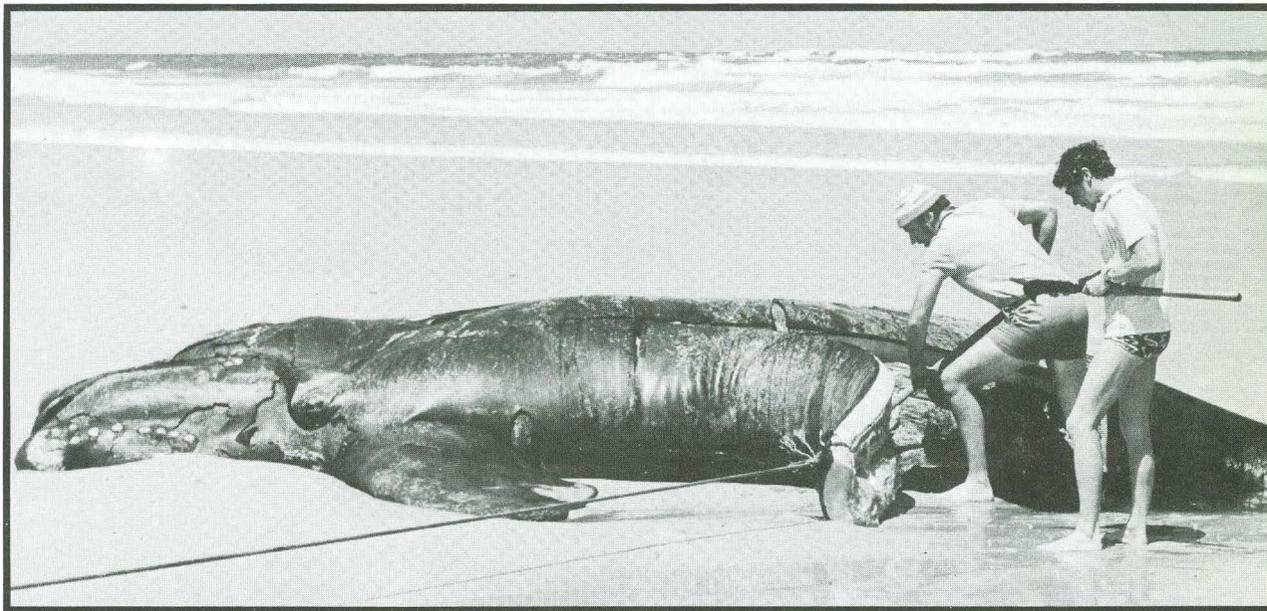
2. The South African whaling station at Cape Hanglip, False Bay, in 1913

3. An instrument with a conical diamond point used for engraving whalebone

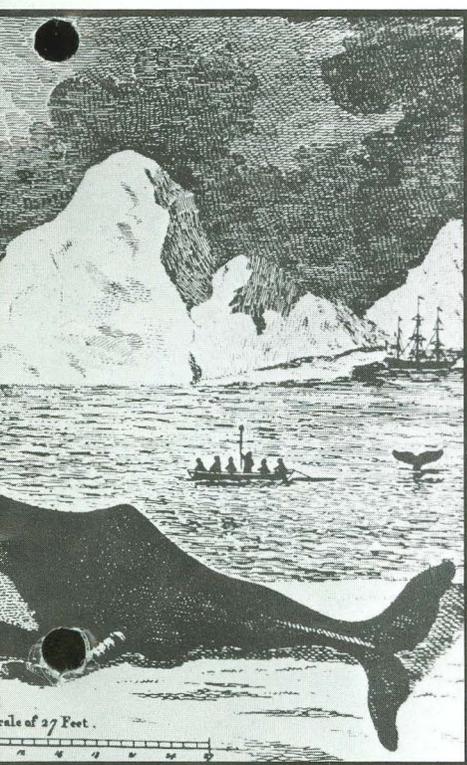
4. Whaling in the days of *Moby Dick* was very different from the catches made today

5. Two pieces of ambergris taken from a whale's stomach at Saldanha Bay in 1947

6. Dr Peter Best of the Division of Sea Fisheries, left, and Dr Graham Ross of the Port Elizabeth Oceanarium dissecting a whale washed up at the mouth of the Sundays River in the south-eastern Cape Province



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siderations, the IWC (which is a fisheries commission) should not be used as a forum to force these policies on countries whose viewpoint may be quite different. In instances where whale stocks are clearly not endangered, management should preferably be by negotiation and not by confrontation.

The International Whaling Commission was founded in 1946 by the principal whaling countries to regulate the industry and to prevent too many whales from being slaughtered. At that time the Union Whaling Company of Durban was one of the largest of its kind in the world. In 1976 the whaling station was closed because quotas had been reduced to such an extent that whaling was no longer profitable. Four of the six whalers were towed to Maputo (formerly Lourenço Marques) for dismantling. The remaining two were converted into a whaling museum.

The 37 nations attending the International Whaling Commission meeting in Brighton, England, in July, 1982 voted to introduce zero catch limits for all whale stocks sub-

jected to commercial whaling in 1985/86. Twenty-five nations voted in favour (including one whaling nation), seven (all whaling nations) voted against, and five nations (including South Africa) abstained. The voting results flowed partly from dramatic changes in the membership composition of the Commission, from one in which whaling nations predominated (72 per cent in 1950) to one where non-whaling nations predominate (77 per cent in 1982). The shift in voting power has meant that the views of non-whaling nations now have a much greater chance of being accepted by the Commission.

In the 1970s public protest against whaling was strong in Europe and in the US. Conservationists said that in the preceding 40 years more whales had been slaughtered than in the 400 years before that. They pointed out that in the Antarctic there were only one thousand whales left of the 100 000 blue whales of sixty years earlier; of the original 50 000 hump-backed whales only 6 300 remained; and the fin whale population had de-

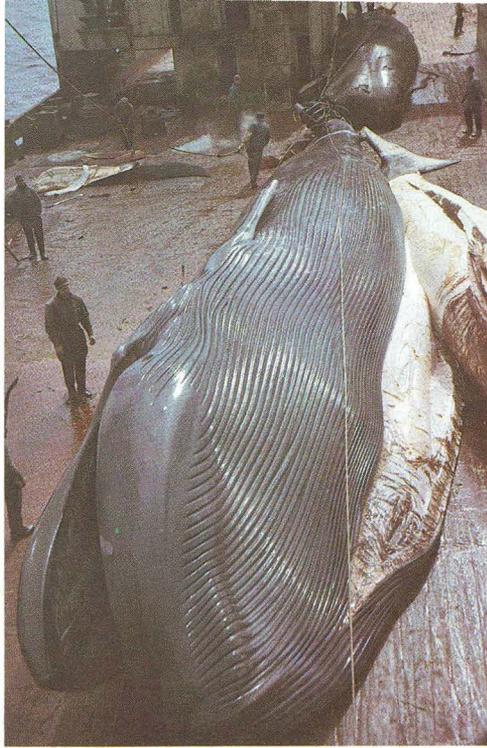
7. A hump-backed whale, caught in Antarctica in 1958

8. A blue whale in Antarctica. The picture was taken in 1958

9. The last Japanese factory ship to visit Antarctica in 1979

10. The coast off Hermanus in the Western Cape Province where whales often come to calf

11. Whale meat for human consumption being processed on a Japanese factory ship



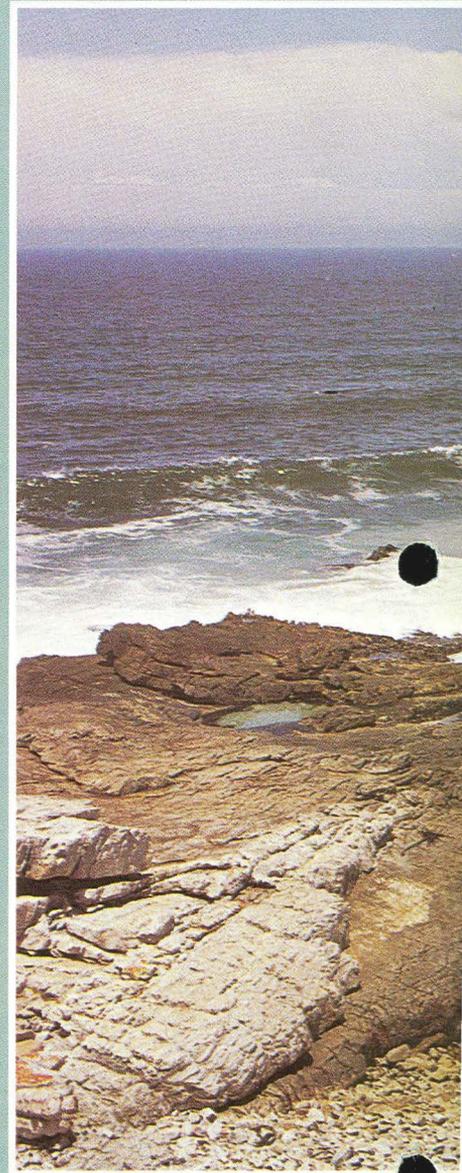
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creased from 420 000 to 92 000.

Protest resulted from the slaughter of blue whales in the 1960s. The blue whale is the largest of the mammals, three times the size of a prehistoric dinosaur. Its tongue weighs as much as an elephant, its heart is the size of an ox, its blood vessels so large that a child can crawl along them. Its brain is one of the largest and best developed in the animal world. Whales can swim at a speed of 30 knots; they are the fastest swimmers in the world. At birth the calf is four metres long, and the fullgrown animal is four times that size.

Scientists believe that this incredible animal has existed for 30 to 40 million years, far longer than man. Some species can live as long as 50 years. It is claimed that they communicate complex messages to each other over enormous distances, and the moving melodies which a particular species sing



have inspired symphonies. The big whales are completely harmless. Children can swim amongst a school of whales without the slightest fear. These animals, each weighing as much as 28 African elephants, live on small planktonic organisms known as krill.

Whales have a strong affection for each other. They will help a sick or injured whale even if it costs them their lives. This is how some biologists explain the so-called suicide of whales. They will protect a sick colleague and not return to the deep until its death. The Vietnamese believed that whales are messengers of the God of Waters, and that they are sent to help fishermen in difficulties, and to carry shipwrecked sailors to safety. Anyone who found a dead whale or dolphin went into mourning for three months.

Conservationists have claimed that whales, as they grow less in number, will in spite of their wonderful system of communi-

cation, find it increasingly difficult to find a mate in such an enormous area of ocean. When it comes to mating, they are apparently more selective than man. They require social contact and the companionship of numbers of their kind before choosing a mate. A cow calves only once in two years. This means, say the conservationists, that they are being slaughtered faster than they breed. Some whale biologists, however, maintain that these claims are highly speculative.

The whale's greatest enemy has always been man. For centuries men have hunted whales for their meat, bone and oil. The oil is used in the manufacture of soap, paint, glycerine and lubricants. The bone is used for such things as umbrella ribs, fishing rods and corsets. Ground fine, the bone makes good fertiliser. In modern times, whale oil has been used in the manufacture of lipstick, pol-

ish, margarine, gearbox oil, lubricants for atomic submarines, and pet food.

The sperm whale's oil is different from that of other whales. It is particularly rich in Vitamin A. This mammal weighs up to 90 tons and lives on octopii and eels. It produces a substance known as ambergris. This is obtained from the intestines and looks like sticky, black rubber. It has a strong smell. Once it has been treated chemically it can be used in scent as a fixative to prevent evaporation. But there is not a single substance obtained from whales that cannot be produced in sufficient quantities synthetically, or which cannot be obtained from alternative sources.

The threat to whales has increased in proportion to the improvement in man's technical capabilities. In the 19th century a whaling expedition usually captured only one whale a month. The toll taken by modern expeditions

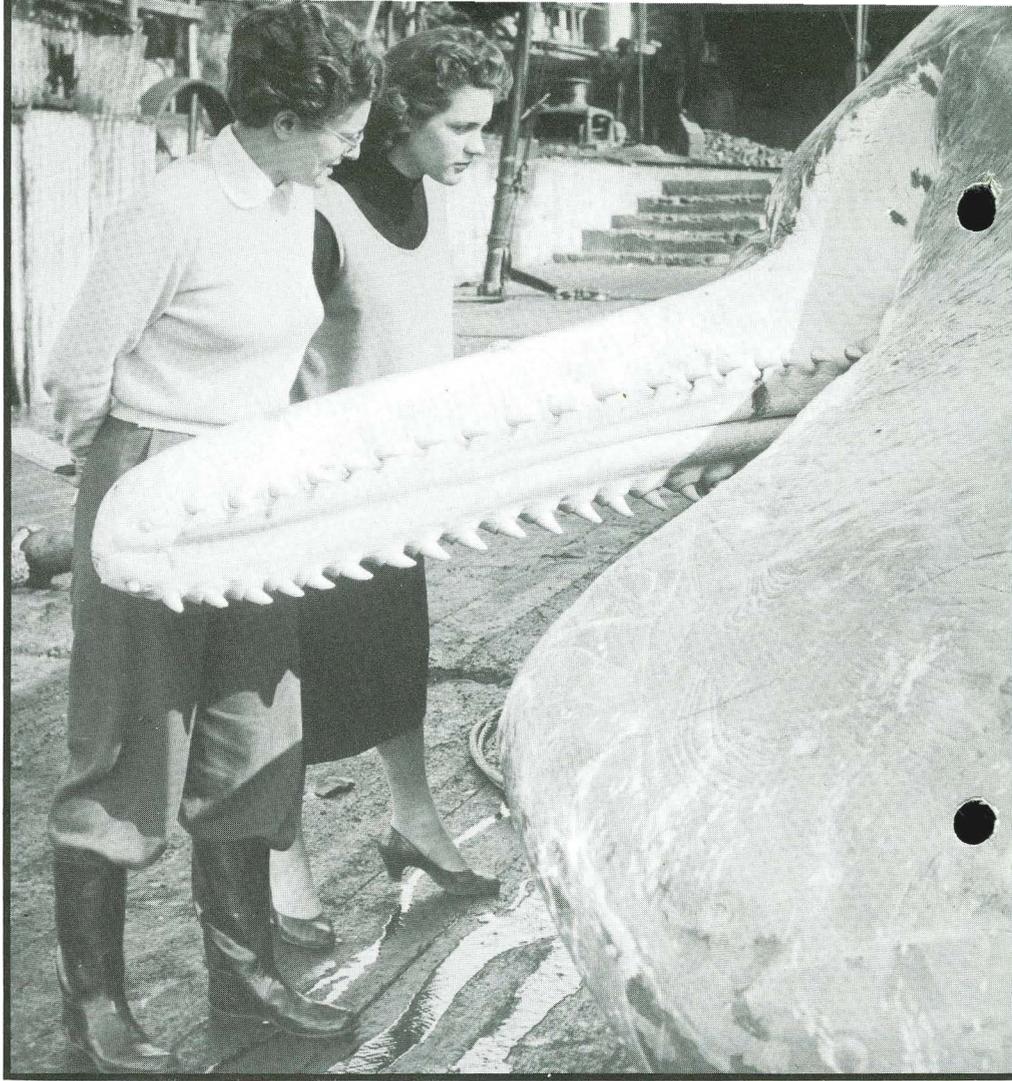
is four per day!

The harpoon once hurled by hand, is now fired from a cannon. After five seconds in the body of a whale, it explodes. In exceptional cases several harpoons may be needed to bring in a single whale.

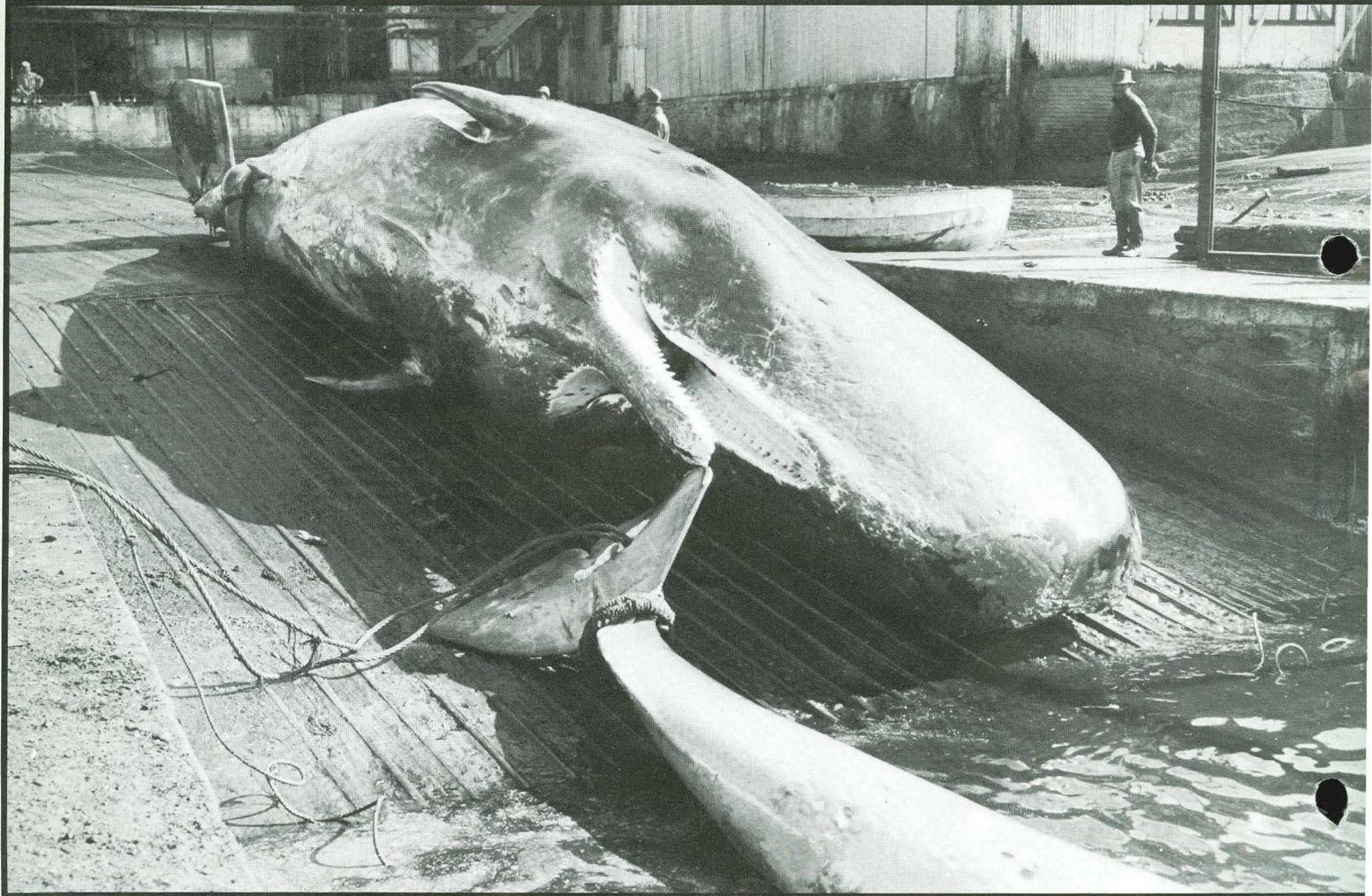
In reaction to a mounting tide of public criticism, the IWC began in 1972 to make significant improvements to its management policies by introducing quotas for individual species, organising an International Obser-



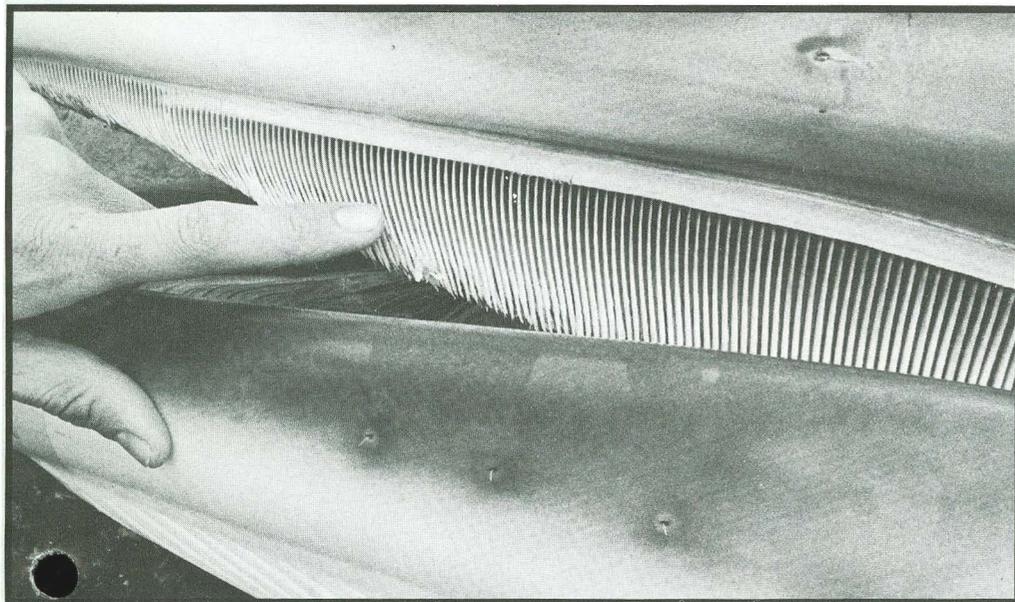
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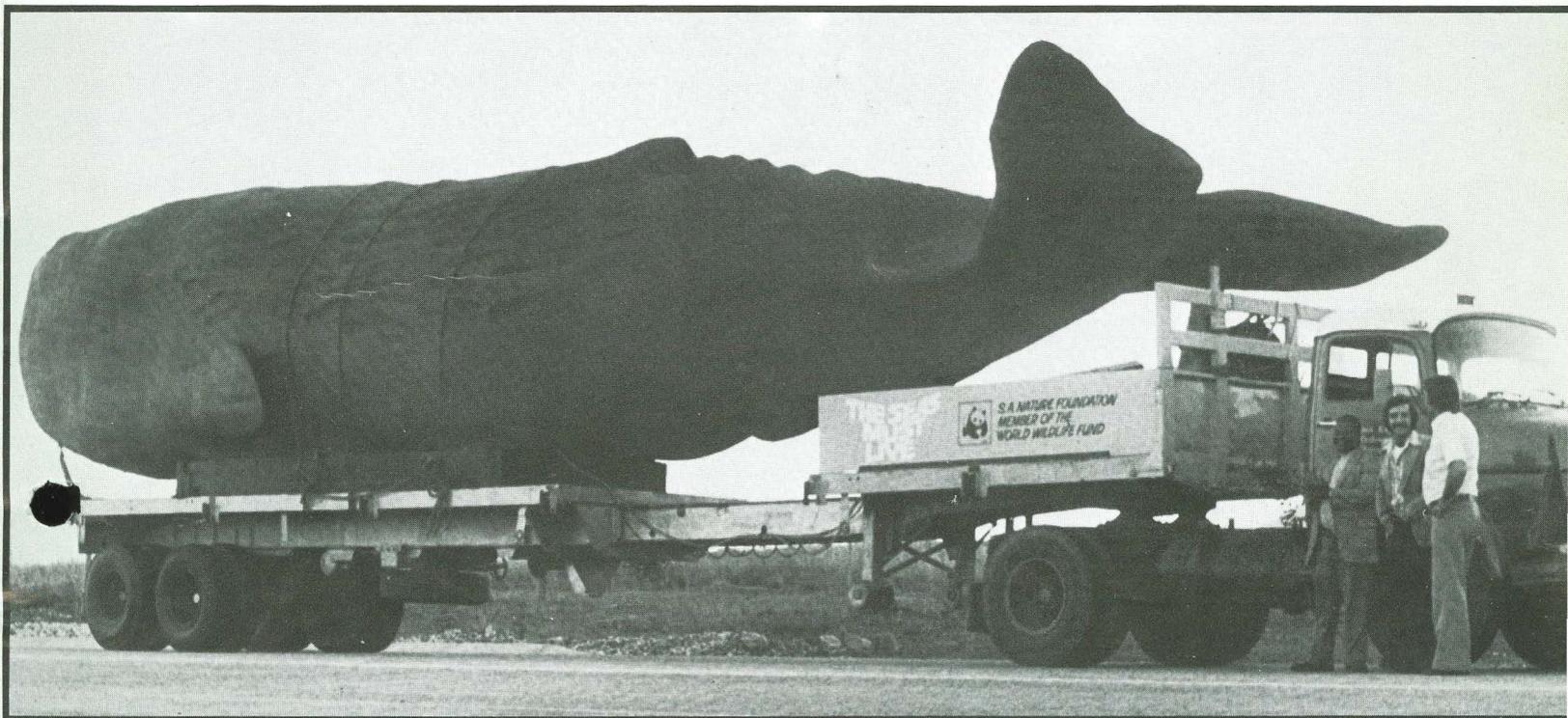
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does not have the legal power to enforce its decisions. Britain decided on its own to cease whaling activities in 1963. In 1971 the USA followed suit and at the same time announced an embargo on the importation of all whale products. Australia stopped whaling in 1978. When South Africa terminating whaling in 1975, its quotas was split between the other countries. Russia and Japan are currently responsible for about 80 per cent of all catches.

For its part, South Africa has done what it could by totally protecting whales in its exclusive fisheries zone, and continues to actively support protection measures for those whale stocks which are harvested at levels higher than what the stocks can withstand in order to survive and flourish as undeniably magnificent creatures of the deep. □



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over Scheme, determination of quotas by stock area and in some cases by sex, and by introduction of a New Management Procedure (NMP) whereby all stocks had to be classified with two important provisions, (a) that no whaling would be permitted on a previously unexploited stock until at least a satisfactory estimate of stock size was available, and (b) that no whaling would be permitted once a stock fell below a predetermined level (usually about 40 per cent of its initial size). As a consequence, southern fin whale stocks were protected in 1976 and the sei whale in 1978.

In addition, the catching power of the whaling fleets has been steadily reduced, so that by 1979/80 only 9 shore stations, 3 factory ships and 36 catchers were in operation. These changes have led the IWC's scientific committee to deduce that a stock is unlikely to be threatened with extinction before the need to reclassify it becomes evident.

Most of this concern surrounds the level of uncertainty in the scientific assessments, particularly questions of stock identity, population size and yield as is the case with many other assessments of marine resources.

The International Whaling Commission

12. The whale washed up at Plettenberg Bay in the southern Cape was the biggest fish this dog ever saw

13. The jaws of a sperm whale have teeth on the lower jaw

14. A whale at the Donkergat factory in the days when South Africa still had a whaling industry

15. An official of Port Elizabeth's Oceanarium points to the fine brushes, known as balein, in the mouth of a small fin whale washed up near the city

16. Jonah, a five-ton fibreglass whale in Port Elizabeth used in the Nature Foundation's publicity campaign, *The Sea Must Live*