

Still time to speak up for the whales

By Janet Bridgers

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Recently, demonstrations were held in every coastal county in California to protest an egregious example of political expediency that if allowed to stand, will result in increased quotas of whale killing.

Earlier this spring, we received news that the Obama administration is willing to send a delegation to the International Whaling Commission meeting later this month with instructions to agree to a compromise. The compromise allows for increased quotas of whaling of some whale species in return for the closing of some existing loopholes.

The news of the compromise took marine mammal activists by surprise. After all, we'd achieved a moratorium on whaling way back in 1986. The news is like a serial ax murderer coming back from the dead and beginning a new round of terrorism.

To say it's aggravating to have to revisit this issue is an understatement because I know that the majority of people are opposed to whaling. And it's surprising, too, that it's coming from the current administration because one would think that President Barack Obama, being from Hawaii, would be very much into whales. But once the shock subsided, the answer is clear. We cannot acquiesce on the question of the whales because it would be a way to make nice with our political buddies — Norway, Iceland and Japan.

It doesn't matter what countries are engaging in whaling. It's just plain wrong. There is no culture on this planet that is depending on whale meat for survival.

In fact, in an article that appeared in The New York Times on May 16, came the revelation that as a whole, the eating of whale meat was never the national tradition in Japan we were told it was. It was only in a few coastal locations — where coastal whaling took place — where people ate whale meat.

The food source was implemented nationwide in Japan after World War II. Now, the percentages of Japanese who eat whale are tiny, and the purpose of the government-supported programs seem to be a political decision to a) preserve some cushy bureaucratic jobs, and b) because the Japanese resent our "western imperialism" for meddling in their culture.

I don't regard the evolution of consciousness as "western imperialism." From whatever country in the world, if we do not bear witness against what we have evolved to see as wrong, then what have we become? Certainly we're no longer creatures made in the image of the divine.

So how does one say graciously, "Give it up, Japan! It's time to move on!?" Plainly. That's how.

And what's the point of compromising for the unenforceable because the proposed whaling compromise would depend on the whaling nations' voluntary compliance, as there's no equivalent of United Nations forces on the high seas. It's just the fox guarding the henhouse. So we easily agree to the compromise, and lose the moral high ground, and the same folks who have been killing whales all along would just keep killing them. No loopholes would be closed.

We must continue to state what is important to us. In the '70s we saw the establishment of the Endangered Species Act. Though the Bush administration tried to abolish it, the act has remained and is a mark of the evolution of our recognition of the rights of other species to exist, and our recognition that we would be impoverished in this world if we did not do what needs to be done in order to protect other species and the habitats on which they depend.

We don't usually think of history as being shaped by silence, but as English philosopher Edmund Burke said: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." So let not complacency rule the day with regard to these magnificent creatures of the sea.

"The price of liberty is eternal vigilance," is written large across the top of the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C. We can add that eternal vigilance will be the price of all forms of environmental and species protection in a world marked by overpopulation and rapacious economic interests.

Those who missed the opportunity to sign petitions at the earlier demonstrations can still engage by e-mailing the White House at <http://www.whitehouse.gov> or call 202-456-1111 and simply say, "I oppose whaling."

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