

CONFIDENTIAL.

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Colonial Secretary.

SUBJECT.

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2nd April.

MARKING OF WHALES -

Note on conversation with Mr. Nielsen,
Manager, Shore Station, Deception Island.

Previous Paper.

MINUTES.

- 1-4. Note on conversation with Mr. Nielsen, Deception Island, 25/3/30.*
- 5. Letter to Sir Samuel Wilson, 1/4/30.*

Subsequent Paper.

(57)

Confidential

1st April, 1930.

Dear Sir Samuel,

I recently sent Mr. Brown, the Assistant Colonial Secretary, to the South Shetlands to inspect the whaling fleet. Whilst there he had an interesting conversation with Mr. Nielsen, the Manager of the Hektor Company. I attach a summary for your information. Mr. Sawyer is Chief Scientist on the "Scoresby".

Yours sincerely,

AW.

BRIG.-GENL. SIR SAMUEL H. WILSON,
G.C.M.G., K.C.B., K.B.E.,
PERMANENT UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES,
COLONIAL OFFICE.

CONFIDENTIAL.

'DISCOVERY' EXPEDITION.

MARKING OF WHALES.

Note on conversation with Mr. Nielsen, Manager of Shore Station, Deception Island.

When at Deception Island I had a conversation with Mr. Nielsen regarding the 'Discovery' Expedition and the marking of whales.

In Mr. Nielsen's opinion and that of Mr. Rayner with whom he told me he had discussed the subject, the marking of whales was the only feasible means of gaining a knowledge of the habits of these animals. He said that if it was the purpose of the 'Discovery' Expedition to investigate such matters they should concentrate on work of this description. He was not in a position to judge the value of the research being carried out but whatever it was he was sure it would be of little benefit to the industry.

He said there was not a whaling company indifferent to the possible effects of present methods of whaling but as no one had any idea ~~of~~ what these effects might be one company vied with another in an endeavour to get as much as possible out of the whaling industry while it lasted. To use his own words 'they fished as if each season was to be their last'.

He said that when one talked of whales one was

'left/

'left guessing'.

Competition was too keen to allow of the companies co-operating in any scheme of research though he was sure many wished they could. In his opinion it lay with the Government to do what was needed. It would have the ready assistance of all the companies in any well directed investigation. It was a pity the Government did not come to the companies for advice instead of undertaking at great expense work which it had ~~not~~ not the technical knowledge to carry out and which at best would only lead to theories. I asked Mr. Nielsen why he did not put his views before the Government. He said he was the youngest manager and older men might think him presumptuous. He was afraid such action on his part would give offence.

He said he had spoken to Mr. Raynor on the subject and gathered that Mr. Raynor was very much in the same position. He was reluctant to put forward any suggestion which might not meet with the approval of his superiors.

Mr. Nielsen suggested to Mr. Raynor that the 'Discovery' Committee should hire a catcher with a crew of Norwegians experienced in whaling. The crew would of course have to be paid wages based on the average earnings of these men. The expense would be small compared with the upkeep of the 'Discovery' and the 'Scoresby' which could be disposed of. He was of opinion that all other research should stand aside until definite results were obtained from this straight-forward method. He said that if the Government wished to preserve the industry they would have to be quick about it. At present they were wasting time as well as money.

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He had further suggested to Mr. Rayner that to enable the catcher to have a large cruising area the committee should approach the whaling companies with a view to supplying the catcher with fuel and stores necessary to allow it to travel from one factory or base to another. In this way the catcher could mark whales during the season around Africa and proceed either east or west along the Antarctic whaling grounds. It could in fact go anywhere. He was sure the whaling companies would do everything in their power to assist.

Mr. Rayner thought this an excellent idea. He was disappointed with the results the 'Scoresby' had obtained. The vessel was unsuitable being difficult to manoeuvre as a whale catcher. Besides, there was no one on board with the experience of a gunner.

Mr. Rayner told Mr. Nielsen that a spare catcher loaned to the Expedition from Stromness Harbour had marked more whales in eight days than the 'Scoresby' had done since the Expedition started. The Gunner in charge had brought them alongside the whales and consequently there had been much better results.

Mr. Rayner was of opinion that the dart at present used by the 'Scoresby' was useless as it did not penetrate far enough. Cases had occurred when an undoubted hit had been made. The disc was plainly visible when the whale disappeared below the surface. When it came up again there was no sign of the disc. A hold in the blubber was not sufficient. The dart must go right through to the flesh. This might be objected to on the grounds of cruelty. Personally I consider such an objection trifling. If the aim were directed to the least vulnerable part of the animal I think the wound would be little more than a pin prick. At any rate the

cruelty/

cruelty cannot be compared with that of killing a whale. In one whale I saw killed four harpoons each weighing over a hundredweight were embedded in the body before the animal was dead.

Mr. Rayner was further of opinion that the dart was not the correct shape. No one could say ⁱⁿ which direction it would travel on leaving the gun. Accurate shooting was impossible. A dart of the shape of a harpoon carrying a length of light chain in place of a disc would be much better. Mr. Rayner considered it highly important that the best equipment should be employed in the marking of whales and that the work should be carried out in the most systematic manner.

II Nearly everyone I saw at Deception Island asked me where the "Discovery" was and what she was doing. They referred to her as the 'mystery ship'. They agreed she was a fine vessel and expressed surprise that the Government did not employ her on some useful work.

Mr. Nielsen said the officers and scientists of the 'Scoresby' were excellent fellows - keen on their work. He had the impression, however, that they had little faith in the usefulness of what they were doing and were rather disheartened. Mr. Rayner was especially disappointed that the theory that whales follow the ice (which I understand has been accepted by the Expedition as a fact) had been disproved. The main fishing this season took place 200 miles north of the ice.

Stanley.

24th March, 1930.

Stanley Brown