

THE DECLINE OF GLOBAL WHALE POPULATION

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Whales have been living in ocean for thousands of years and play an important role in the marine environment. But according to some recent surveys their number is in decline. The number of Atlantic right whales has decreased by a shocking 8 % in a single year. One of the reasons, experts single out is commercial whaling. Hunting for whales in Europe dates back to the ninth century. By the end of the seventeenth century, whales began to disappear off the coast of Europe. In the 20th century the situation became even worse reaching its peak in 1950's when about 50,000 animals were killed.

However, overwhaling turned out to be the one of those problems that the present generation is able to solve. The International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling, signed up by 89 countries, was adopted in 1946 in order to save whale population and control whaling worldwide. Besides, the Antarctica Marine Reserve in the Ross Sea was created at the end of 2017 to protect the Antarctic flora and fauna. The described measures have shown some positive results but still whales are now under threat from other activities such as plastic and noise pollution, high ship traffic and the fishing industry (whales and some other large marine creatures may die because of being caught in fishing gear and nets designed to target other species).

Underwater noise pollution has resulted in disrupting normal behaviors, increasing stress levels, impairing feeding, and masking communication; even causing permanent injury or death. Whales' sounds become simpler and they can no longer recognize one another. They may accidentally choose the wrong direction and beach themselves. In such cases, their mass suicide can occur. Unfortunately, there are no laws or documents regulating permissible sound level in the seas and oceans.

Thus, there is a necessity to take urgent steps to prevent consequences of whale population loss. At least transport potential of the ocean should be assessed with a further introduction of appropriate restrictions.