

The Wake of the Whale: Human and Environmental Implications of Whaling in the Caribbean and North Atlantic

In the Faroe Islands and St. Vincent & the Grenadines, people hunt pilot whales and other dolphins to produce food for human consumption. This talk describes whaling activities and cultures in both locations and addresses the idea of “culturally embedded conservation strategies”—the largely unwritten body of customary rules that develops gradually, through processes of cultural adaptation to a local natural environment, and performs regulatory function in the context of natural resource use and conservation. While these strategies have been largely successful in maintaining sustainable take levels, newly emerged data from environmental toxicology research presents a scenario that may surpass the ability of these conservation strategies and may even lead to the end of these traditional methods of subsistence. Analysis of cetacean tissue samples show concentrations of mercury far in excess of international consumption guidelines. The Faroe Islands are decades ahead of St. Vincent & the Grenadines in their reaction to the toxicological risks. This talk concludes by considering the value of knowledge transfer from one whaling context to another.