



# Why I sink ships.

*Editorial by Paul Watson*



In 1977, I founded the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society as an international marine conservation enforcement organization. Sea Shepherd does not protest whaling or over-fishing, we simply enforce existing international treaties and regulations against whaling and fishing operations in accordance to established laws. We are empowered to act under the authority of the section on implementations in the United Nations World Chapter for Nature that empowers individuals and non-governmental organizations to intervene to enforce international conservation law.

Since 1979, ships and crew under my command have been involved in rammings with eight other ships and we have sunk another ten ships, all of them outlaw whalers with the exception of one Taiwanese drift-netter. We have confiscated scores of miles of monofilament drift net and we have sabotaged whale processing stations. In all of these confrontations, we did not injure or kill a single person, nor did we suffer a single injury. We have never been convicted of a single criminal offense.

Our opposition are criminals. We oppose corporations, and sometimes governments that are responsible for killing whales or exploiting fish populations in violation of international regulations. Although we have been severely criticized for our controversial and aggressive tactics—after the smoke has cleared—the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society remains an enforcer of laws against pirates.

In taking the stand that we have, we have been called pirates ourselves and it is a label that we wear with pride, remembering that it was not the British Navy that put an end to the piracy in the Caribbean—it was Captain Henry Morgan, a pirate himself.

When dealing with greed motivated pirates, more progress can be made by being a compassionate pirate. To deal with radical and unorthodox exploitation, it is sometimes necessary to take a radical and unorthodox stand.

Sinking ships has been our most controversial tactic. We have been meticulous in our preparations to ensure that we do not jeopardize human life and we have been successful. Our record began with the ramming and sinking of the most notorious of the pirate whalers—the *Sierra*—that now, fifteen years later, lies as a rusting hulk in Portugal's Lisbon harbor. We followed with the sinking of half the Spanish whaling fleet in 1980, half the Icelandic whaling fleet in 1986 and two Norwegian whalers, one in 1992 and the last in 1994.

The *Sierra* and the Spanish ships were never repaired or replaced. The Icelandic ships were repaired at great cost and were retired from whaling from 1986 until 1995. The Norwegian ships were re-floated with heavy losses to the owners.

Our strategy concerning Norway is different from previous campaigns. We have scuttled only two of Norway's fifty whaling boats. In doing so, we financially damaged

all of them. Today, as a result of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, all Norwegian whaling vessels must pay war insurance premiums that average an extra \$3000 per vessel per year. In addition security costs to protect these whalers from us have exceeded the profits realized killing whales.

This is a language the whalers can understand. In my opinion, we will never be able to educate the Norwegians, the Icelanders or the Japanese to willingly give up whaling but we can make it so costly that they will be forced to retire their harpoons.

Sinking the ships has been relatively easy. First we scout the vessels to ensure that crew are not on board. The *Sierra* and the Spanish ships were sunk with small limpet mines attached by divers. The other ships were boarded and scuttled from within. We located the salt water intake valves, closed the valves, dismantled the piping and

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then re-opened the valves that began the rapid flooding of the engine room. Tackled in this manner, a ship will usually sink within an hour.

In addition, with our newly acquired miniature submarine the *Mirage*, we now can attack whaling ships from beneath utilizing underwater cutting gear or a hydraulic punch.

Most of our covert activities against whaling ships are undertaken by a group we have set up independently of Sea Shepherd and called O.R.C.A. FORCE or Oceanic Research & Conservation Action Force. We look for volunteers with technical diving skill and we have used former US Naval SEALs and German Naval commands within this unit.

The Norwegian newspaper *Dagbladet* criticized us for using in their words, “trained killers.” I answered that it was important to use people who are trained to follow orders, to take precautions and to be professional. When our orders are that no-one is to be hurt, these orders have been obeyed. Using “trained killers” who are also trained to follow orders is safer than using an amateur who might cause an injury or death accidentally.

Our methods have been attacked by other conservation organizations including Greenpeace of which I was a founder. Our

defense is that our methods have been effective and non-violent. We do not believe that destroying a whaling ship to save whales is violent. If anything it is an act of non-violence. There has been much dispute as to the definition of violence. Our view is that violence is that which causes harm to sentient life and non-violence is that which protects life. However, in a culture that reveres property over life, definitions get hazy.

Not only do we sink and ram ships but we believe that it is important that we accept responsibility for our actions and that we defend these actions in a court of law if need be. When we have appeared in the Court, we have won or have had any charges dismissed. To date, not a single Sea Shepherd crew member has been convicted of a crime that has not been reversed by an appellate court. We have been recognized as an auxiliary to the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard and we have received a commendation from Guatemala for ramming a dolphin killing tuna boat in Guatemalan water. My ships have been given berthage in both British and US Naval dockyards and gifts of fuel and paint from the British Royal Navy and the German Navy.

It must be understood however, that we really don't care how we are perceived by the public or by other conservation organizations. We do what we do for the oceans and for the benefit of future generations. In doing so, we know we will not win many popularity contests in the present. Our role is to rock the boat, to make waves, to be controversial, to say things people do not want to hear and to do things people do not like.

Most environmental problems and threats to wildlife are caused by human greed. To stand up face to face to this dark side of humanity is to provoke strong passions and emotions.

The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society acts like an acupuncture needle to stimulate a response to a situation. We are the shock of the marine conservation movement and as such we fill a niche in the spectrum of diversity that is necessary for a strong and effective movement.

We ram ships. We sink ships. We confiscate and destroy nets. It's what we do and we apologize to no one for it. We save lives, protect entire species, preserve habitats and most importantly we uphold the law within a society that cares little for nature and lusts selfishly for itself.

Call us sea-cops, radicals, pirates, vigilantes, or even terrorists. The bottom line is that we get the job done and we do it responsibly and with a deep commitment to the children of tomorrow.

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