

## **Polluting the English Language to Justify Slaughter**

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### **Commentary by Paul Watson, Sea Shepherd Conservation Society**

For years I have been annoyed at some of the terminology used in conservation and environmental circles. I think we should consciously try to think about changing the words we use. We need to put an end to the utilitarian, consumeristic jargon that is employed to justify ecological exploitation and the infliction of cruelty on nonhuman species.

Let's start with the Canadian seal hunt. This is not really a hunt when you think about it. No one is tracking, stalking, or pursuing seals. The sealers merely walk through a nursery of defenseless seal pups and whack them on the head. The little fellas can't escape, they can't swim, and they can't defend themselves. Let's call it what it is – a slaughter or a massacre. I like to call it the Canadian National Obscenity.

[http://www.seashepherd.org/editorials/editorial\\_050614\\_1.html](http://www.seashepherd.org/editorials/editorial_050614_1.html)

And you don't harvest seals or fish or any other animal. That word has to go. You harvest corn, oranges, or apples but not seals or fish. I notice farmers don't even use the term for cows or pigs. They slaughter cows and pigs they don't harvest them. So, why the use of this word? It's just another attempt to remove the ugliness of their actions from the language.

The Canadian government has even tried to label baby seals as adults by defining an adult as any seal over three weeks age. It seems to me that any seal that can't swim, can't escape, and is helpless on an ice floe at three weeks of age qualifies as a baby seal.

And this word sustainable. This gem was dreamed up by that whale-killing former Prime Minister of Norway Gro Harlem Bruntland. She was all for conservation so long as it was outside the borders of Norway and did not involve Norwegian fishing vessels.

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This word sustainable popped up around the time of the U.N. Conference on the Environment and Development in 1992.

What does it mean? After you strip away the spin and the green-washing it simply means: business as usual.

For example, there a great deal of talk about the value of “sustainable fisheries.” I can’t think of many fisheries that are truly “sustainable.” Practically every commercial fishery in the world is in a state of commercial collapse, yet you can still find “sustainably-fished” cod or salmon, (at least it says so on the label).

Another word used these days is “stocks.” It makes it sound like the ocean is our private warehouse. We use terms in fisheries like “managing the stocks,” or the “stocks have been reduced,” or the “stocks are healthy.”

It makes it sound like its all neat and handy, and already on the grocery shelf. The correct term is populations. We don’t say there is an “unhealthy stock of humans messing up the environment.” Nor do we say that the “stock of humans need to be managed,” although Hitler attempted to do just that. I wonder if the Nazi’s referred to the Jews as stocks?

When you put the three above-mentioned words together, you get the “sustainable harvesting of stocks” of fish. Talk about separating ourselves from nature.

Sometimes the word fish is replaced by the word “product”

“Yes sir, we caught a million cans of product this season, all canned up and ready to go to market, sustainably, and humanely harvested, of course.”

Which bring us to the term “humane,” as in “humane killing.”

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This term suggests that killing is acceptable as long as it is humane. It actually means killing of animals is acceptable by humans so long as we can appease our guilt by making it sound okay by humanizing the action.

This, of course, has led to the absurd description of the Canadian seal hunt or the Japanese dolphin slaughter as “humane sustainable harvesting of stocks of seals/dolphins.”

By simply using the word “humane,” we can accept that being bludgeoned in the head with a spiked club is kind of okay because it is described as humane.

Imagine the outrage if animal shelters put down dogs with a club instead of lethal injection. Of course, we avoid the word “kill” in the shelters by saying we put the poor animals to “sleep.” It sounds much nicer.

We always hear about how Faeroese whale killers “humanely saw through the neck of a pilot whale to sever the spinal cord.” It takes a few minutes but the Danish government has said that the slaughter of pilot whales is a humane, sustainable, harvest of wild pilot whale stocks.

And to add insult to injury we name some whales “right whales” because whalers viewed them as the right whales to kill because they were slow and did not sink after they were killed. I would prefer to see the Patagonia right whale called simply the Patagonia whale.

And the poor little minke whale has been insulted with the moniker of a notorious Norwegian whaler, a sadistic character by the name of Captain Minke who liked to kill whales. I would prefer to have the whale named after someone who likes whales or defends whales instead of some serial murderer of whales.

And why is it that you can't describe an animal killer as a murderer?

Webster's dictionary defines murder as the killing of another human being, but it also says that

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to kill or slaughter inhumanely or barbarously is also murder.

Homicide is the correct term for the killing of a human being. Cetacide is the killing of a whale and simicide is the murder of a chimpanzee. I think that murder is an acceptable term for describing the barbarous slaughter of a seal or the inhumane killing of a dolphin or an elephant.

We just like to pretty things up to deny our responsibility in the willful taking of life.

I also like how people who eat meat describe themselves as meat-eaters. Some even say they are carnivores. A real carnivore would have a laugh over this self-aggrandizing description. Human beings are not meat-eaters. Carnivores hunt down, pounce upon, and rip the flesh from the body of their prey while the animal is still alive. Now, I admit there are a few strange people who eat live monkey brains and live squirming eels but the average human does not eat living flesh. In fact, the average non-vegetarian human is a carrion eater. They eat dead flesh.

Sometimes the flesh they eat has been dead for weeks or even years. It looks all red and fresh thanks to chemicals, bleach, and dyes.

Humans are closer to vultures, hyenas, and jackals than to the noble lions, tigers, and wolves they try to emulate.

And then there is the categorizing of people into different camps in an attempt at dehumanization. Environmentalists are often called eco-terrorists although no environmentalist has ever terrorized or hurt anyone. Yet corporations like Union Carbide, Shell, and Exxon can kill people and cause incredible environmental damage without the media referring to them as eco-terrorists. Usually, it is the employees of these corporations that call the nature defenders eco-terrorists. It figures.

We don't have a logging industry anymore, they call it silviculture. It goes along with the Healthy Forest Initiative where a healthy forest is a forest that is harvested, humanely, and sustainably, of course. The loggers are now "forest nurturers" who farm the forests for the benefit of future generations.

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And finally the word conservative. What happened with this word? Conservative means to conserve, to maintain the status quo. When did Conservative come to mean undermining the Endangered Species Act or the Clean Air Act? When did conservative mean being anti-conservationist?

As a conservationist, I've always viewed myself as a conservative but now I find that the right-wing, radical, wacko anti-conservationists who destroy forests, overfish the oceans, and pollute our rivers are now calling themselves conservative and accusing me of being a radical for working to conserve nature and endangered species.

I think it is clear that we have a serious language pollution problem.