

REMARKS by Oregon Congressman Les AuCoin to the Whaling
Moratorium Seminar,
June 12, 1979
Washington, D.C.

"Thank you for taking the time to come. As you know, the International Whaling Commission meets next month to establish new quotas for next year's commercial harvesting of whales by 19 member nations.

"I hope this seminar will give more understanding of the whale problem. I also hope it will bolster support for bills I and my colleague from Vermont have introduced urging the whaling commission to impose a moratorium on commercial whale killing.

"My view is based on the following facts. Last year alone 38,000 whales were slaughtered. For more than a quarter of a century the IWC has been warned of the threatened extinction of these mammals. In the last 50 years more than 2 million whales, including the rarest species, have been slaughtered by commercial hunters.

"How many whales are left in the world? Because of a chronic problem of inadequate data -- a problem that has been compounded by the reluctance of some nations to provide essential data to the IWC -- no one can say with any degree of certainty. This makes it all the more important to stop the continued killing of these great mammals.

"There's nothing romantic about man the predator, using helicopter spotters, shooting an explosive harpoon from modern whaling ships into the vital organs of a whale, which may then thrash about for hours before it dies. It's a blood, cruel and debasing business.

"The Soviet Union and Japan account for between 80 and 85 percent of the total yearly whale take. Therefore, efforts to halt whale slaughter must be aimed at these two countries. Each year they kill about 31,000 whales, bringing these animals nearer and nearer to extinction.

"Japan and the Soviet Union implicitly take the position that their need for whale meat and oil justifies

their intensive exploitation of this resource. I think we should examine that. With respect to the use of whale meat, Japan takes the position that it provides a needed protein supplement for the national diet. I would like to point out that only about 1 percent of all protein consumed by the Japanese comes from whale meat. Furthermore, the amount of fishery products exported by Japan is approximately 12 times greater than the amount of whale meat consumed in Japan.

"The Soviet Union does not make use of whale meat in its diet regime. Its main interest is in whale oil, particularly that of the sperm whale. In recent years Soviet production of sperm oil has seen a sharp increase, going from 79 to 90 percent of the total world use. It is nevertheless a fact that various substitutes have been developed for sperm oil that no longer makes it essential or even useful to hunt down and destroy the largest creature inhabiting this planet.

"There are cost-effective substitutes for all whale products. No longer does the world need the whales for lamp oil, soap, cosmetics or lubricating oil. But the whalers appear bent on killing the last whale on the last day of the last whaling season.

"The only rationale for continued whaling lies in extracting as much return on current investment in whaling fleets as possible before world opinion finally halts the operation.

"The sooner that day comes, the better. Time is running out for the great whales. It is time now for the United States to assume leadership in obtaining a truly international commitment to save the remainder of these great creatures."