The Scientific Whaling Loophole

At the recent International Whaling Commission’s annual meeting in Panama, South Korean officials announced their plan to initiate a “scientific whaling” program (1). This announcement came as a surprise given the general sentiment that the global demand for whale meat is declining. After weeks of international outcry, on 17 July, South Korea reversed their decision to hunt whales for research, but the issue is not dead (2).

South Korea claimed that the goal of the scientific whaling program is to study the types and amounts of fish whales eat, given conflict with fisheries. Yet, it is well established in the scientific literature that there are many ways to study whale diet without killing them (3). Decades of fruitless negotiation between pro- and anti-whaling nations suggests a broken system, wrought with loopholes that allow unsustainable whaling to continue. Within this broken system, there is no incentive to reduce whaling, as the recent announcement by South Korea shows. Whaling groups are unwilling to compromise by allowing a sustainable harvest of whales, so unsustainable (scientific) whaling continues.

To ensure a future of both whales and whalers, we must harness the passion and value that people place on living whales, without telling people what to do or force one set of values on others. We need novel, out-of-the-box approaches to effective management and conservation of whales. We must compromise to ensure reductions in whales being killed, better oversight of countries that harvest them, and limited whaling that does not threaten the persistence of whales.

For those who believe that whaling is unethical, I challenge you to put forward alternative ideas to a global moratorium that fosters the “loophole” of scientific whaling. With new plans to develop scientific whaling programs (4), the current global moratorium is clearly broken. Scientists, conservation advocates, resource managers, and the public must work together to develop new approaches to ensure the persistence of whales in our oceans.

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References
land and ocean ecosystems to climate change and elevated CO₂ concentrations.

Greenhouse gas measurements along tall towers in the interior continents allow quantification of regional sources and sinks, which has a very high relevance for measuring the effectiveness of climate policy. NOAA ESRL provides measurements that are critical for the U.S. national security in that they provide independent verification and early warning of changing greenhouse gas emissions from countries involved in efforts to mitigate greenhouse gases.

Dedicated carbon-observing satellites such as GOSAT and OCO-2 are needed to fill in the missing geographical information required for verification of carbon flux mitigation efforts. However, satellite retrievals do not yet provide sufficient information to deliver new constraints on surface fluxes, although quick progress is being made in this direction. In situ observations are crucial for anchoring space-borne measurements, for detecting potential biases of remote sensing techniques, and for providing continuity given the finite lifetime of satellites.

Despite the growing importance of greenhouse gas observations to humanity, substantial budget cuts at NOAA have resulted in curtailment of our ability to observe and understand changes to the global carbon cycle. Already, a dozen surface flask-sampling sites have been removed from NOAA’s operational network and aircraft profiling sites have been eliminated and reduced in frequency at the remaining NOAA sites. The planned growth in the tall tower program has stopped, and plans for closing some towers are being developed. The U.S. budget process in this election year, with the added risk of mandatory across-the-board cuts due to the 2011 Budget Control Act, foretells more bleak news for greenhouse gas monitoring at NOAA and could cause further retreat from the goal of recording ongoing changes in atmospheric composition. As scientists, we believe that preserving the continuity of these vital time series must remain a priority for U.S. carbon cycle research.

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Many scientists and engineers contribute valuable time away from the established career paths of research, teaching, and publishing to foster activities and develop programs that both address key science questions and build important societal links. AAAS seeks to recognize an individual or a limited number of individuals working together in the scientific or engineering community for making an outstanding contribution to furthering science diplomacy.

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The award is open to all regardless of nationality or citizenship. Nominees must be living at the time of their nomination. Please visit http://www.aaas.org/aboutaaas/awards/int/ for more information and nomination instructions.

All materials must be received by September 1.
Decoding Cryptosystems

R. STONE’s NEWS FOCUS STORY ABOUT PAN Jianwei’s marvelous quantum optics experiments (“Entangled secret messages from space,” 29 June, p. 1632) propagates some unfortunately common misconceptions about the uses of quantum key distribution (QKD) technology, especially its integration into a complete cryptosystem.

The confusion arises in the distinction between a cryptographic key and a communication session encrypted via the key. QKD does not carry or encrypt the message directly. Instead, QKD uses a classical communication authentication mechanism, quantum eavesdropping detection, and a healthy dose of statistics, as well as both quantum and classical randomness, to generate a random bit string that is known to be secret and shared only between two parties. This random bit string is then used as the encryption key for a standard, classical encryption system.

The ultimate success of the cryptosystem in protecting sensitive data depends on several factors. One such factor is the QKD implementation itself; no general attack against QKD is known, but various attacks have been proposed and even implemented against the photon generators, detectors, and electromechanical subsystems. Implementers respond by fixing problems in the usual thrust-and-parry of security systems implementation.

The security of the data depends on the strength of the classical encryption. The ideal use of the key would be to use it once and discard, as in a one-time pad (OTP), but current QKD key generation rates are far below desired classical communication rates, leading implementers to use the key for encryption schemes, such as Advanced Encryption Standard (AES), which encrypt many data bits with the use of fewer key bits. If used properly, OTP is perfectly secure, whereas AES could be broken by trying all possible keys, a theoretically possible but computationally impractical task.

Rather than flat statements that communication using QKD is totally unbreakable, it is more correct to say that it presents a different attack surface.

This Week in Science: “Tie TOC1 plant clock” (6 April, p. 11). The editors note that the title of this summary was not intended to convey a connection between TOC1 and the plant gene Tic.

Reports: “The B73 maize genome: Complexity, diversity, and dynamics” by P. S. Schnable et al. (20 November 2009, p. 1112). Reference 27 should be C. Liang, L. Mao, D. Ware, L. Stein, Genome Res. 19, 1912 (2009). The reference has been corrected in the HTML version online.

letters to the editor

Letters to the Editor

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References and Notes


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CORRECTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

News Focus: “Where are the missing baryons?” by Y. Bhat-tacharjee (1 June, p. 1099). Oxygen VI is oxygen stripped of seven electrons, not six, and Neon VIII is neon stripped of seven electrons, not eight.
Iconic CO$_2$ Time Series at Risk


Science 337 (6098), 1038-1040. [doi: 10.1126/science.337.6098.1038-b]

Editor's Summary

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