

WHALING IN LAMALERA-FLORES

*by ProFauna Indonesia
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1. FOREWORD

Indonesia is renowned for being an archipelago of islands surrounded by wide open seas. Indonesia's territory is also located in between two bodies of water, the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean. Due to this unique geographical position, Indonesia often becomes a pathway used to migrate by sea mammals, such as whales and dolphins.

An important migration path of sea mammals is the waters of East Nusa Tenggara, particularly the Sawu Sea. Lamalera is a village directly facing Sawu Sea of which community is historically famous for being hunters of whales, dolphins, and other large sea mammals. For the most part, Lamalera's coastline is arid thus placing the surrounding waters as their main source of income and sustenance.

It is based upon the above reason that in the period of June-July 2005 ProFauna conducted a whale hunting investigation at Lamalera Village and Lamakera Village, East Nusa Tenggara.

2. FINDINGS

Throughout the June-July 2005 period, ProFauna Indonesia visited Lamalera and Lamakera villages in East Nusa Tenggara Province. Details on the location and findings of the site are as follows.

2.1. Lamalera Village

Lamalera is a remote village well-known for its peoples' profession as whale hunters. Lamalera is located on the southern coast of Lembata Island, East Nusa Tenggara. Lembata, once integrated with East Flores Regency, is now an independent regency of its own. Lamalera Village is divided into two sub-villages: Lamalera A and Lamalera B, each with a population of approximately 2.000 people.

In the past years, Lamalera was a remote and isolated village located far from the hub of the local government, but now development of electricity facilities and paved highways have commenced to alleviate transportation difficulties to and from the regency's capital. During the summer, this village is very dry and arid. As far as the eye can see, only savannas and dry, thorny bushes adorn the landscape. This condition has caused the Lamalera community to become dependent upon fisheries every year to sustain their lives.

2.1.1. Whale hunting in Lamalera

Traditional whale hunting in Lamalera has been done since the 7th century. Whaling ships from the Americas and Europe visited this area in the 18th century (Barnes 1980). As of today, traditional whale hunting is still being carried out. Based on the current data, there is fluctuation on the number of whales being caught every year,

yet the cause contributing to this is still uncertain. The highest number of whales captured occurred in 1969 when 59 sperm whales (*Physeter macrocephalus*) were caught.



Before the beginning of hunting season, Lamalera villagers possess a tradition to carry out a traditional culture ceremony as a means to request blessings from their ancestors and pay respects to those who died at sea. The ceremonial process is held every 1st of May, signaling the beginning of the whale hunting season, otherwise known as the “Lefa” season.

Whale hunting will normally occur during the months of May-November, but occasionally it has also been found to take place in December-April whenever a whale happens to pass through the Sawu Sea. Thus making the Lefa season a special time of the year to go to sea, and hunt whales, dolphins, sharks and various other sea mammals. Everyday except Sundays during the Lefa season, the people of Lamalera will go out to sea and hunt together.

As for the rest of the year, the Lamalera society will traditionally produce salt, weave textiles, or grow corn in the rocky arid surroundings.

Whale hunting in Lamalera Village is done traditionally. The people involved and equipments used in the process are:

1 Peledang

Peledang is a name for the ship used for hunting whales. The width of a *peledang* is 1.5 m with a length of about 7 m. In constructing a *peledang*, the rule is that there must not be any metal pins used to attach the pieces of wood. All parts of the boat must be made using wood and enjoined by wooden pegs. Every *peledang* is designed roofless to ease the task of watching whales while at sea.

2 Tempuling

Tempuling is the name of the spearhead used to thrust at the whales. This spearhead is made from metal and shaped in the form of a ‘Y’.

3 Bamboo

A bamboo of 4 m in length is used as a pole for the spearhead/ *tempuling*, and a grip to hold when thrusting at a whale.

4 Rope

The rope should be 50 m in length. One end of the rope is tied onto the *tempuling* and the other end is tied to the ship/ *peledang*.

5 Balafaing/Lamafa

Balafaing/Lamafa is the name for the thruster, the most significant person of the team who determines the success or failure of the hunt.

6 Ship captain

7 Matros

Matros are the ship’s crew whose main function is to assist the *lamafa*/ thruster in the whole whaling process. In one ship there should be at least 7 *matros*.

Early morning at around 7 a.m. local time, the ships will have gone to sea. Hunting is sometimes conducted as far as 12 miles of the coastline of Lamalera, requiring 2-3 hours of sailing before they reach the destination. After a whale has been sighted, the captain will then steer the ship towards the targeted creature. After the whale is within reach, the thruster/ *lamafa* will aim and stab at the whale. It is frequently seen that the *lamafa* will need to stab several times before the whale is dead. The whale will of course fight back, and because of that quite a number of ships are wrecked in the process and some of the crew even suffered fatal injuries.

After assured that the whale is dead, the body is then tugged by the ship towards Lamalera Beach. As soon as they reach shore, the whale’s body is cut and divided equally based on the customary law. All of the whale’s body parts are consumed to give benefit to the people, whether it is the meat, hide, fat, blood, or carcass. When one whale is successfully killed, all the people in the village receive equal portions, although they did not go to sea. The reason to this being their portion can be used to trade for other fish or crops.

2.1.2. Hunted whale species

Several customary provisions have been agreed upon the sex and maturity of whales allowed for hunting by the Lamalera people hundreds of years ago. According to their ancestors, whales not permitted for capture are whales in the breeding phase, young whales, and pregnant females. Despite those strict rules, the contemporary society seems to ignore and proceed with their hunting however they please.

The whale species normally hunted by the Lamalera people is the sperm whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*) or as often identified by the local people as “Kotoklemah”. They always avoid killing other whale species, such as minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) because according to their belief this particular whale has once assisted the need of their ancestors.

Species and amount of whales hunted between 1996 – 2005 by Lamalera people

Species	Scientific name	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Per Sept '05	Total
Pilot whale	Globicephala spp.	3	8	2	76	23	18	31	42	29	30	262
Dolphin		3	8	2	6	97	113	115	22	135	94	595
Hiu paus		2	10	24	0	0	0	0	7	13	8	64
Beaked whale	Mesoplodon densirostris	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
Killer whale	Orcinus orca	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	1	2	8
Sperm Whale	Physeter macrocephalus	5	10	23	6	14	35	27	19	13	2	153
Minke Whale	Balaenoptera acutorostrata	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Jumlah		13	36	51	88	134	166	173	90	191	139	1.086

Source: Lamalera elders/ whale hunters (investigator's interview)

From the above table, we can conclude that the Lamalera people hunt 5 species of whale crossing the Sawu Sea. The length of the whales they hunt is an average of 6-13 m. Whales are the primary target for hunting for a Lamaleran society.

The whale's body parts consumed by the people are:

- a. Meat, the color of whale meat is red like all other mammals. Normally the meat is salted and dried under the sun's heat which can then be kept for up to one year.
- b. Hide, whales possess a hide of 10-20 cm thick which can be used for various things. This is also preserved through a natural, solar drying process.
- c. Oil, derived from the hide and fatty parts of the brain. Usually when the hide is being dried under the sun, oil will drip out and those drops are then collected in a basin. This oil is used to light lanterns without contributing to any air pollution, opposite to lanterns using crude oil. Whale's oil can also be used as cooking oil and even medication for numerous illnesses.

- d. Carcass, a whale's carcass is originally used to pound corn, but now it is mostly turned into souvenirs and merchandise items for sale to tourists visiting Lamalera village such as ashtrays and whale miniature sculptures.
- e. Teeth, usually made into rings or necklaces. Based on the belief of some of the Lamalera people, whale's teeth can be used to counter evil spells and trickery.
- f. Blood, is also mixed by the people of Lamalera as an ingredient when cooking whale meat dishes.

Besides whales, dolphins are usually the most-often caught sea mammal in the hunting process. Because dolphins live together in groups, there can be many dolphins killed in one time. Dolphins caught are normally 1-3 m in length.

From 1996 to 2005, it is noted that 1.086 sea mammals have been killed by the Lamalera people. A majority of the hunted and killed sea mammals are dolphins.

2.1.3. Whale meat trade

Every Saturday, dried whale meat is bartered with agricultural crops at the Wulandoni Village trading market. The barter that takes place in this market are regulated by certain agreements starting hundreds of years ago.

In the past few years, there has been a Korean gentleman, Mr. Mon, who has thought of a golden business opportunity in trading whale and dolphin meat for consumption purposes. According to the Head of the village, Mr. Mon once owned a whale meat restaurant in Korea, but was forced to close down when it was proclaimed illegal.

Mr. Mon plans to open a Korean restaurant in Jakarta with a specialty menu of whale and dolphin meat. Mr. Mon once ordered 4 tons of whale and dolphin meat for the price of Rp 10.000 per kg. The Lamalera community had of course been interested by the order, but because there were not very many whales that year, the contract had to be cancelled.

2.1.4. Price list of a whale's body parts

Basically, the Lamalera people do not directly trade whale meat, but preserve it to be bartered with other needs. Other than that, there may be a few people in the village who make souvenirs out of a whale's carcass, or sell the whale's teeth to tourists visiting the village.

Table. Price list

No	Whale's body parts	Price (Rp)
1	Carcass	5.000 - 7.000
2	Ashtrays	40.000 - 200.000
3	Teeth	5.000 - 100.000
4	Oil	20.000 - 100.000

2.2. Lamakera Village

Lamakera Village is located in the eastern coast of Solor Island, East Nusa Tenggara. Geographically speaking, the village of Lamakera is similar to Lamalera meaning that in the summer the village is also very dry and arid.

The Lamakera people regularly only seek fish that are of high demand in the markets, such as tuna, flying fish, etc, but when they go hunting and come across whales, particularly minke whales (*Balaenoptera acuturostrata*) or dolphins, they will hunt them down as well. This is why on board their ship the Lamakera people always have whale hunting equipment ready which is alike in appearance to the equipment used by the Lamalera people.

Lamakera Village is uniquely situated near to where the currents of Solor, Adonara, and Lembata Islands meet causing many minke whales (*Balaenoptera acuturostrata*) to be present in the surrounding waters. The people of Lamakera seldom hunt sperm whales (*Physeter macrocephalus*).

In one year there are at least 4 minke whales killed by the villagers of Lamalera. The whale meat is then brought to Waiwerang, a small town in Adonara Island, to be traded. A large piece of whale meat 50 cm x 100 cm x 50 cm in volume is sold only for the price of Rp 100.000.

3. CONCLUSION

Whale meat trade



Commercial trading of whale meat is found only in Lamakera Village, whereas in Lamalera, whale meat is used purely for barter purposes. The traded meat is usually in the form of a large square chunk with a volume of 50 cm x 100 cm x 50 cm sold for the price of Rp

100.000 at Waiwerang market. By the time they reach Waiwerang, the large chunk of meat is then divided by the sellers into smaller pieces for sale between Rp 5.000 – Rp 10.000.

Each year the people of Lamakera manage to catch around 4-10 whales, most of them minke whales (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*).

Whale oil trade

Besides meat, whales are also being hunted for their fat and oil. Oil is derived from the whale's fat dried directly under the sun or heated first on a stove. Other than its use to light lanterns or serve as cooking oil, the oil is also often sold to tourists visiting Lamalera. The price of the oil varies from Rp 20.000-Rp 100.000 depending on the trade location and buyer. The price given to foreign tourists will normally be higher than the price suggested to local tourists.

Whale carcass trade

Previously, whale carcasses were considered to be of no use, but now they are increasingly being traded with a price range of Rp 5.000-Rp 7.000. Many whale carcasses are sent to Ende, Flores.

In Lamalera, whale carcass is used to make souvenirs such as whale miniatures and ashtrays. The souvenirs are then sold for various prices from Rp 40.000- Rp 200.000. Another part of a whale that is often traded is its teeth, particularly the teeth of sperm whales (*Physeter macrocephalus*), long-finned pilot whales (*Globicephala melaena*), and killer whales (*Orcinus orca*). Whale teeth are sold for the price of Rp 5.000 each. As a comparison, when it has already been turned into a ring the value becomes around Rp 100.000.

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