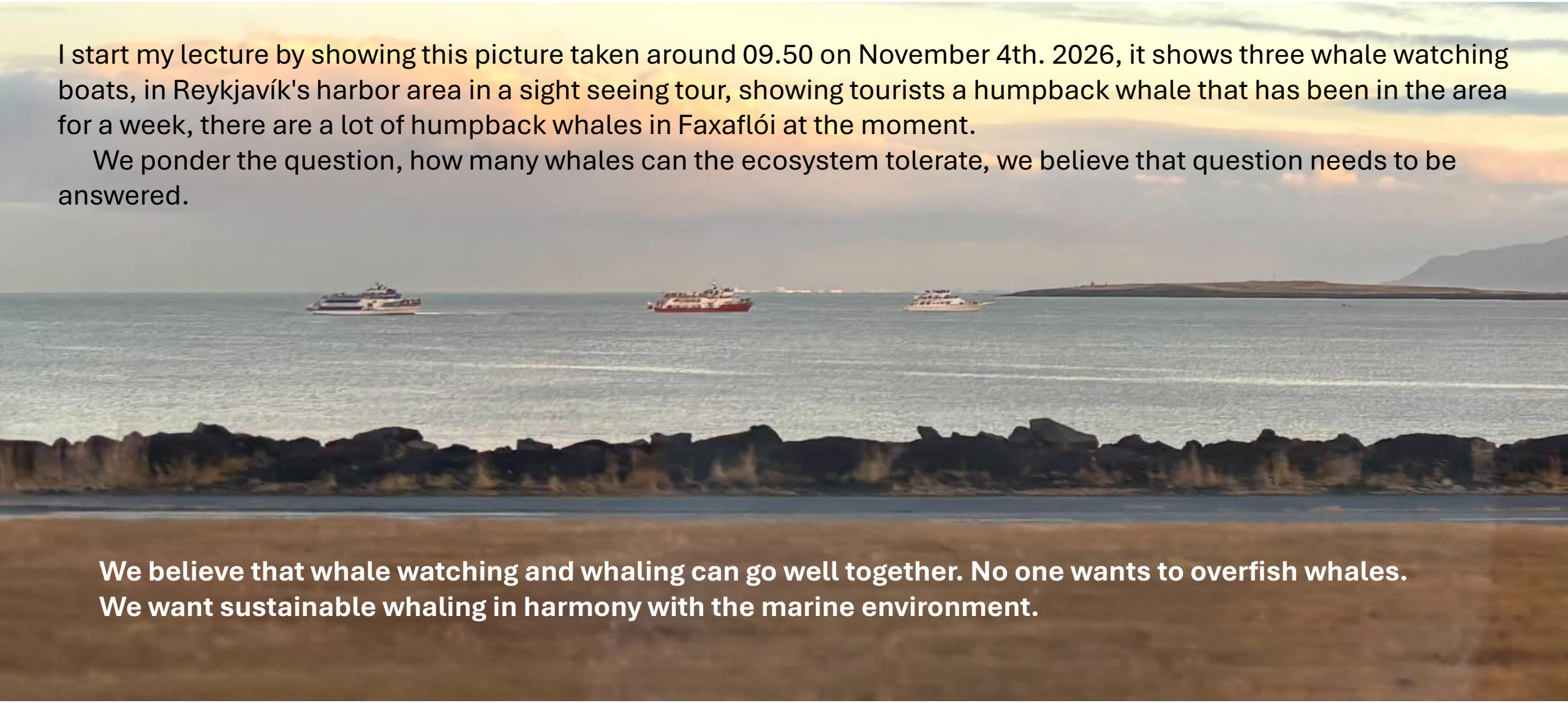
Marine mammals & fisheries 4th november 2026

Árni Sverrisson CEO, Chief of the board

The presentation is about the concerns of members in our union about the increase in the number of whales around Iceland and their impact on the ecosystem and population sizes of commercial fish stocks.

The Icelandic Maritime Officers´ Association

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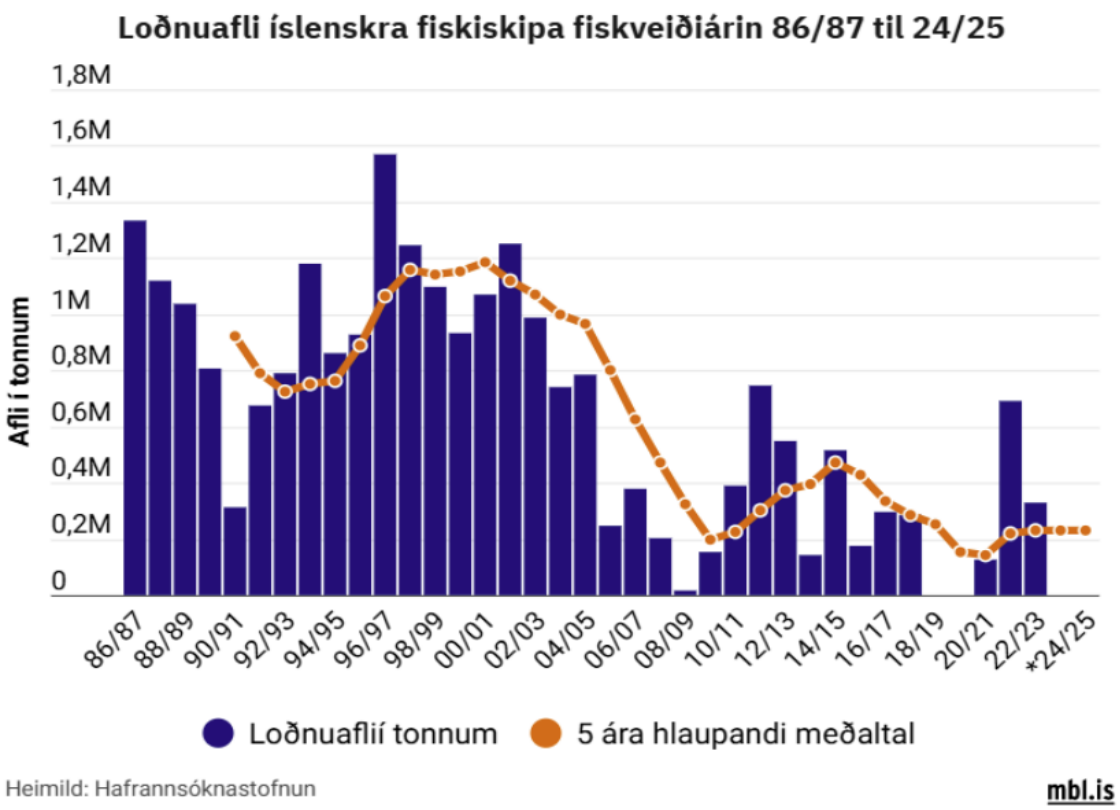


I start my lecture by showing this picture taken around 09.50 on November 4th. 2026, it shows three whale watching boats, in Reykjavík's harbor area in a sight seeing tour, showing tourists a humpback whale that has been in the area for a week, there are a lot of humpback whales in Faxaflói at the moment.

We ponder the question, how many whales can the ecosystem tolerate, we believe that question needs to be answered.

We believe that whale watching and whaling can go well together. No one wants to overfish whales.
We want sustainable whaling in harmony with the marine environment.

Capelin catch by Icelandic fishing vessels 1986 to 2025
Blue column, catch by year.
Line 5 years average catch.



No capelin 2019, 2020, 2024 2025 WHY

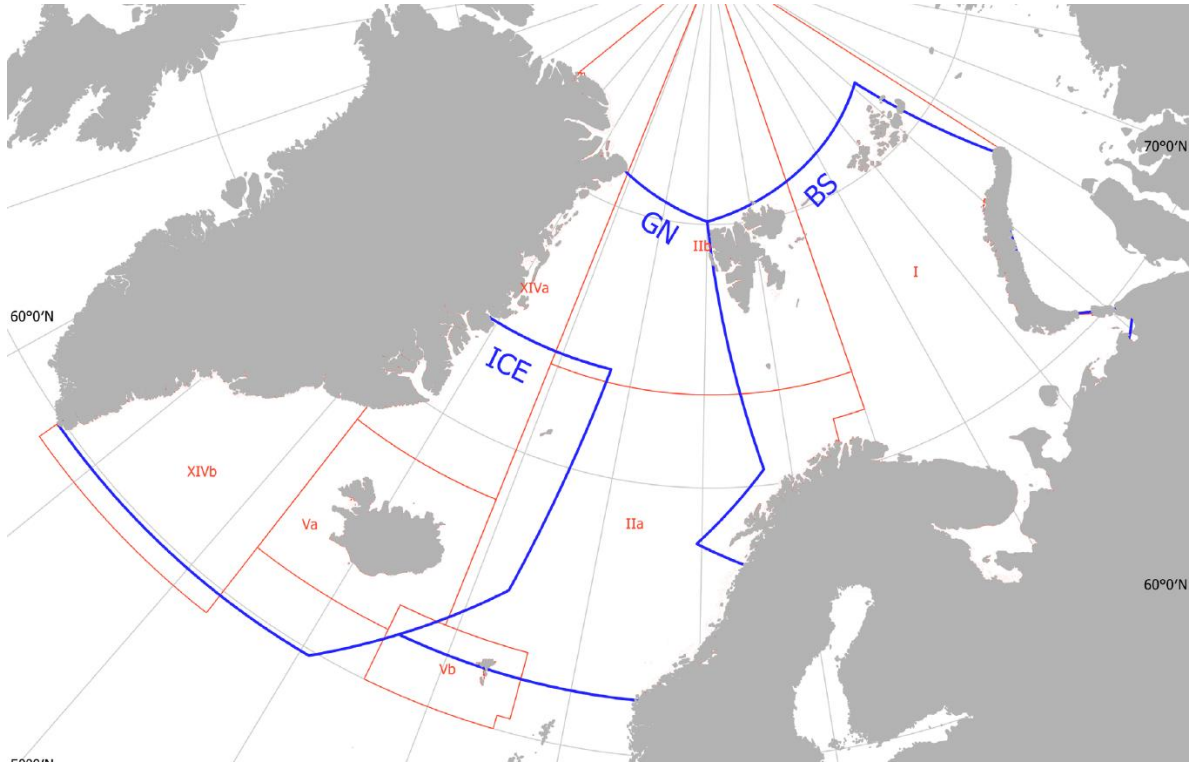
On February 15th 2025, Guðmundur J. Óskarsson scientist stated on mbl.is—addressing the absence of capelin this winter 2024-2025 —that there are strong indications that the productivity of the capelin stock has declined. He discusses fluctuations in year-class strength, the impact of environmental changes and sea temperatures, the scientific advice provided by the Marine and Freshwater Research Institute (Hafró), and the quantity of capelin consumed by predators, including cod and **whales**.

Captains clearly believe that the increase in the number of whales affects the size of the capelin population, causing a decrease in the weight of cod, for example.

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Marine mammal consumption and fisheries removals in the Nordic and Barents Seas | ICES Journal of Marine Science | Oxford Academic





In a study by Skern-Mauritzen and colleagues 2022, it was estimated that marine mammals in the ICE region consumed an average of **13.4 million tonnes of food annually,** with a 95% uncertainty interval ranging from 5.6 to 25.0 million tonnes.

By comparison, the annual catch from fisheries in the same study area amounted to approximately **1.55 million tonnes.**

Consequently, the consumption by marine mammals was estimated to be, on average, **about 8.6 times greater than the catch from fisheries**.

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Scientists, like captains, say that an increase in the whale population will, sooner or later, have a negative impact on future fisheries.

„Víkingur“ is our assosiation magazine. In the first issue of „Víkingur“ in 2000, whale scientist Gísli Víkingsson wrote an article about the status of whale stocks and their feeding habits in Icelandic waters. Unfortunately, Gísli died far too soon, may his memory be blessed.

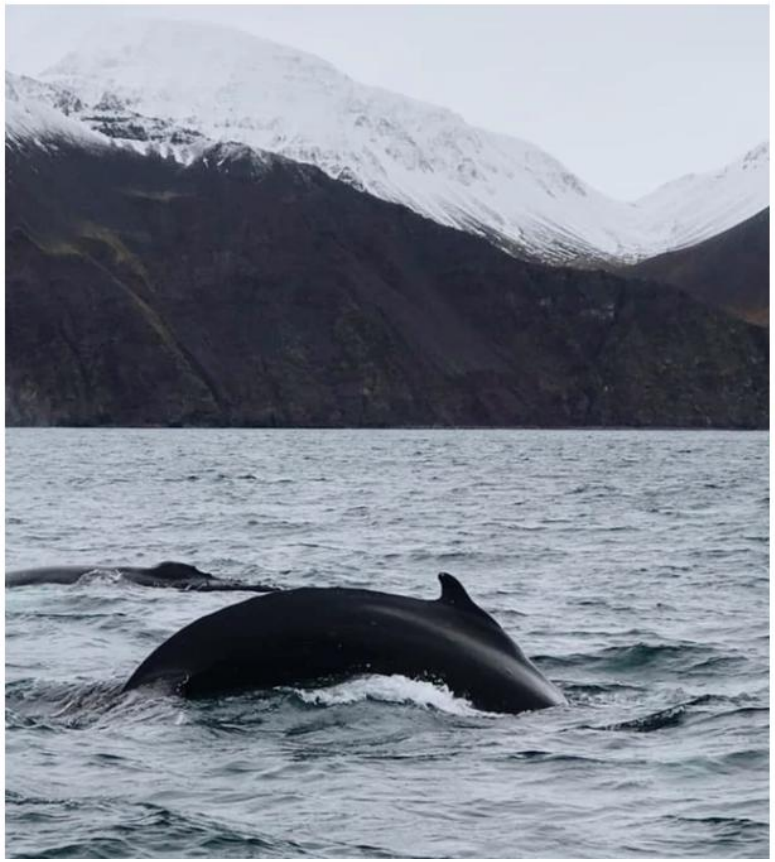
What did Gísli say in his article?

“A large portion of the whale diet consists of commercially important species that are also targeted by fishermen. It is a common misconception that sei whales (Balaenoptera borealis) feed exclusively on planktonic organisms such as krill. In reality, however, sei whales—much like toothed whales—consume various species of fish.” And later: “It is an established fact—both old and new—that fishermen compete with marine mammals for the food resources provided by the sea. Following a ban by the International Whaling Commission that has lasted over a decade, most whale populations appear to be in good condition, and their numbers are on the rise. If this growth continues at the current rate, it is self-evident that the total amount of food consumed by whales will increase accordingly. Such a trend is bound, sooner or later, to have a serious negative impact, ultimately resulting in a significant decline in future fisheries.”

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Friday, March 29, 2019

CAPELIN FEEDING FRENZY IN THE NORTH



It is no secret that there is a lot happening here off the coast of Husavik in North-East Iceland. Every morning is filled with excitement and everyday is a different adventure. The activity in Skjalfandi bay has been nothing but busy. Orcas coming far into the bay - carousel feeding in the south. Then a huge amount of humpback whales have been seen feeding on capelin in the northern part of the bay, by both us and plenty of fishermen.

The other day when there were no whales seen in the inner part of the bay, we decided to head further north than usually. We could not believe what was waiting for us there - 10-15 humpback whales and a fin whale! Spouts were everywhere as we approached them. They were all very close to shore and we were the only boat by miles. Thousands of birds, only the sound of nature and very excited passengers onboard Sylvia. It was a moment I will never forget.

Yesterday the humpback whales were seen further south in the bay - still feeding on capelin! So I am incredibly excited about this weekend's tours! Who knows what will happen? Time will show!

Photos and text: Aksel Bjarnason (guide)

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Two humpbacks feeding at the capelin fishing grounds, closed in the purse seine.



Unfortunately, this is becoming more common sight, especially during capelin fishing.

Whales either escape by swimming over the cork line (the yellow one) or swim through the net, resulting in damage to the fishing gear and the loss of the catch.

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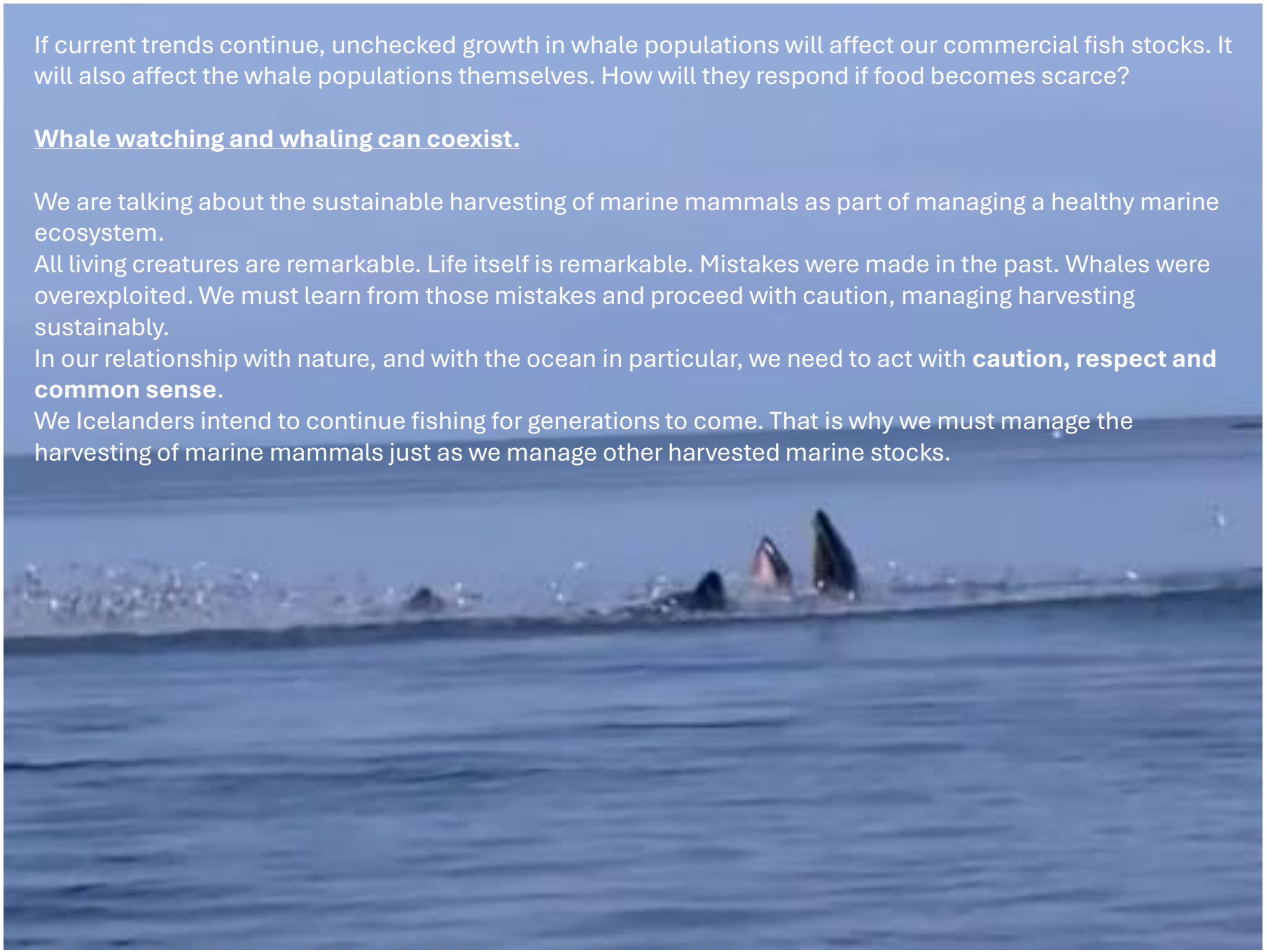


It happens with increasing frequency that whales become trapped in the purse seine nets of vessels during capelin fishing—often resulting in significant damage to fishing gear and the loss of the catch.

If current trends continue, unchecked growth in whale populations will affect our commercial fish stocks. It will also affect the whale populations themselves. How will they respond if food becomes scarce?

Whale watching and whaling can coexist.

We are talking about the sustainable harvesting of marine mammals as part of managing a healthy marine ecosystem.
All living creatures are remarkable. Life itself is remarkable. Mistakes were made in the past. Whales were overexploited. We must learn from those mistakes and proceed with caution, managing harvesting sustainably.
In our relationship with nature, and with the ocean in particular, we need to act with **caution, respect and common sense**.
We Icelanders intend to continue fishing for generations to come. That is why we must manage the harvesting of marine mammals just as we manage other harvested marine stocks.



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Thank you

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