

DOLPHINS DROWN IN TUNA NETS

More than 134,000 dolphins, considered one of the most sensitive and intelligent members of the animal world, were mutilated or killed by tuna fishermen last year in their efforts to bring in record tuna catches.

In spite of the requirement in the Marine Mammal Protection Act that the tuna industry was to reduce dolphin deaths to near zero by 1974, tuna fishermen killed even more of these marine mammals during 1975 than in 1974. And, because of the industry's success in convincing federal officials that they can't comply with the law, there is no reason to believe there will be fewer victims this year.

While some effort has been made by the industry and the federal government to develop improved technology for taking tuna, HSUS believes such developments will have little effect in protecting dolphins in the immediate future. Consequently, HSUS leaders have voted to join a nationwide campaign to urge consumers to refrain from buying tuna.

In joining with the Animal Welfare Institute, the Sierra Club, and other environmental organizations for the campaign, HSUS leaders call on members and supporters to immediately cease the purchase of all tuna products. While it is only the yellowfin tuna that swim with schools of dolphins, and they are normally labeled as "light" tuna, the campaign is aimed at reducing sales on all tuna because any attempt to differentiate in the boycott might not have the desired effect.

While there are several subspecies of porpoise and dolphins, it is the spinner porpoise, the spotted porpoise, and the common dolphin that are being slaughtered by the Pacific tuna fleet.

Ironically, it is these creatures that have made tuna fishing a lucrative industry in this country. Tuna fishermen discovered long ago that yellowfin tuna swim beneath pods of dolphins, which are easily spotted because the marine mammals swim on the surface and leap gracefully out of the water.

When the tunaboat captain spots the mammals, he sends speedboats out to encircle them and move them into an area adjacent to the parent vessel. One of the speedboats then pays out a gigantic $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile long net attached on one end to the fishing boat. The net is towed completely around the dolphins and attached to the other end of the fishing boat. The top of the net is buoyant, while the bottom is weighted to fall 300 feet below the surface. When the bottom of the net is drawn shut, as on an old fashioned purse or laundry bag, the tuna are trapped. Then, as the top is drawn shut, the dolphins that have not swum out of the encirclement are also trapped. Many of these sensitive, intelligent creatures get their fins and snouts caught in the net. Many others are crushed to death, suffocated, or drowned as the net is hauled on board. Still more are injured by the poles that members of the ships' crew use in an attempt to get the dolphins out of the net during the hauling-in operation.

Even for the survivors, the future is bleak. The injured mammals become prey for sharks, and the entire social order of this highly organized species is thrown into disarray by the death of their fellow creatures.

This purse seining method of tuna fishing is so profitable that one canning company, Van Camp, has just had three mammoth purse seines constructed, each costing approximately \$5 million, according to the Animal Welfare Institute.

When the U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act was passed in 1972, humanitarians thought their battle to protect dolphins had been won. But the tuna industry has conducted a highly successful lobbying effort to convince the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) that it cannot meet the provision of the Marine Mammal Protection Act requiring it to reduce to "insignificant levels" the number of dolphins incidentally killed in purse seining operations.

NMFS has required the tuna industry

to comply with terms and conditions of an annual permit for incidental taking of dolphins. However, that system appears to be worthless. Robert W. Schoning, NMFS director, disappointed humanitarians and conservationists last November when he announced that a quota for dolphins being taken in 1976 would be established only if the number taken by May exceeds 70% of the 1975 total. The November statement considerably modified an earlier proposal that would have set a ceiling on the number of incidental kills and would have required a federal observer on every boat in the fleet.

In light of these developments, HSUS and other environmental and humane groups have concluded that the only hope for stopping the senseless slaughter of these creatures is to convince the tuna industry that the public will not tolerate this abuse. In addition to not buying tuna products, consumers are urged to write letters of protest to the presidents of the major tuna canners. A

list of their headquarters is printed below:

Del Monte Corp., Box 3573, San Francisco, CA. 94119

Castle & Cooke (*Bumble Bee, Cloverleaf*), Astoria, OR. 97103

H. J. Heinz Co. (*Star-Kist*), Box 57, Pittsburgh, PA. 15230

Ralston-Purina (*Chicken of the Sea*), Checkerboard Square, St. Louis, MO. 63188

At Press Time—On May 11, U. S. District Judge Charles R. Richey issued a ruling which declared the incidental killing of dolphins, as now occurs in current tuna fishing practices, to be illegal; and, requires the Federal Government to comply with the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Unfortunately, this does not necessarily mean the end of the legal battles to stop this cruel and inhumane practice, and the boycott is still urgently needed.

Photo by Gary Laurish

