

# SAVE THE WHALES... from the carbon market!

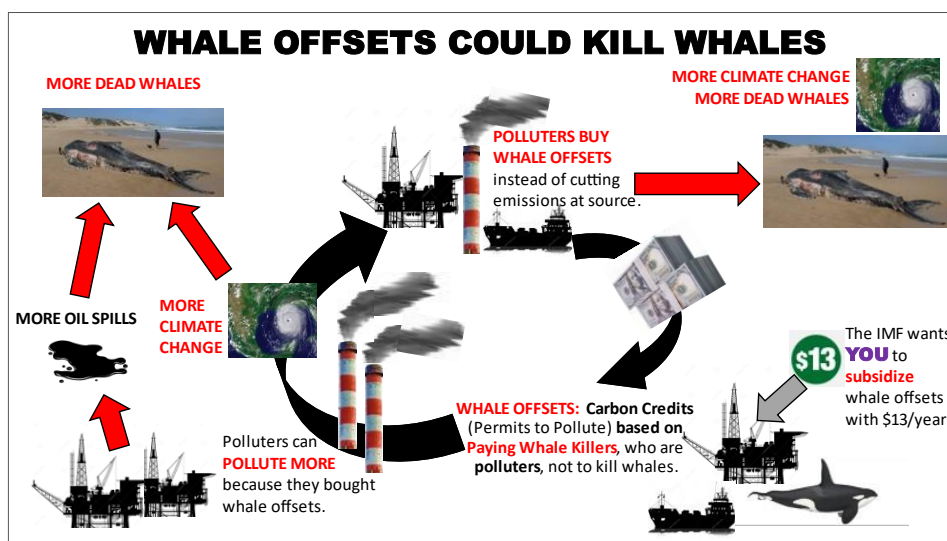
*This text contains content and images that some may find distressing.* <https://globaljusticeecology.org/whale-offsets/>

National Geographic and Disney+'s *Secrets of the Whales* may be part of a global campaign to convince you to help put whales into the carbon market, which could speed up the extinction of whales. In episode 4 of *Secrets of Whales*, National Geographic and Disney+ tell us that whales and their "poop" help combat climate change.<sup>i</sup> The International Monetary Fund, the counterpart of the World Bank, agrees, calling whales "Nature's Solution to Climate Change."<sup>iii</sup> In fact, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has calculated that you need to pay \$13 a year to "save the whales"<sup>iii</sup> and the planet.<sup>iv</sup> According to Ralph Chami, Assistant Director of the International Monetary Fund's Institute for Capacity Development, "If whales were allowed to return to their pre-whaling numbers - capturing 1.7 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub> annually - it would be worth about \$13 per person a year to subsidize these whales' CO<sub>2</sub> sequestration efforts."<sup>v</sup> Sacred whales, the biggest mammals of the world, the leviathans of the ocean, are being reduced to a giant carbon offset business opportunity.<sup>vi</sup> And you are supposed to be the funding mechanism for this ghastly false solution to climate change; this fake silver bullet to global warming.



Photo: © Craig Lambert / stock.adobe.com

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The United Nations,<sup>vii</sup> 41 countries including the United States,<sup>viii</sup> the International Monetary Fund as well as "conservation" groups such as WWF<sup>ix</sup> and The Nature Conservancy,<sup>x</sup> among others, are in favor of whale offsets. The whales of the world are on the verge of being transformed into permits to pollute - available to be bought and sold on the carbon market. Whales are slated to be reduced to mere "fish carbon"<sup>xi</sup> or "blue carbon."<sup>xii</sup> These prototypes for the commodification and privatization of oceans and all of Life for carbon offsets and greenwash, go by many names such as the United Nations' "Nature Based Solutions,"<sup>xiii</sup> the U.S. Congress' Ocean-Based Climate Solutions Act,<sup>xiv</sup> the World Bank's Blue Economy,<sup>xv</sup> the Blue New Deal,<sup>xvi</sup> the Global Deal for Nature,<sup>xvii</sup> and the Green Economy.<sup>xviii</sup> Promoters of whale offsets **want you to help pay whale killers, including the fishing, shipping, gas and oil industries, not to kill whales so they can be used as carbon offsets, even though those very same whale killers pollute and cause climate change, which in turn kills whales.** The above graphic shows how the IMF wants your \$13 bucks a year to subsidize whale offsets, which could pay whale killers, increase pollution, worsen global warming and kill whales.

## The false premise of whale offsets

Whale offsets are calculated based on how much carbon dioxide whales absorb and how their iron-rich excrement serves as food for tiny marine algae called phytoplankton, who also absorb carbon dioxide. However, the carbon stored in whales and phytoplankton is only stored TEMPORARILY. When whales and phytoplankton die, they decompose and RELEASE carbon dioxide. Whale carcasses take decades to fully decompose,<sup>xix</sup> but decompose they do. In the process, they are fed upon. Whoever eats them sooner or later also dies and releases carbon. Nature is not static. **Whales are not a vacuum and safe deposit box for the world's carbon.** And whales most certainly are not “a trillion-dollar climate change fix!”<sup>xx</sup> Not only is the premise of whale offsets false, the premise of all offsets based on Nature is false. In the report *Trade and Climate Change*, the World Trade Organization and the United Nations candidly admit that **Nature cannot absorb increasing greenhouse gas emissions**, because the capacity of terrestrial ecosystems and the oceans to absorb carbon dioxide is plummeting.<sup>xxi</sup> Nonetheless, the creation of a whale offset mechanism is hailed as viable and, according to the IMF, will include “compensating those causing the threats [to whales], a group that includes countries, businesses, and individuals.”<sup>xxii</sup> That is to say, whale offsets will pay those who threaten the survival of whales.

## Who kills whales?

The two leading causes of whale deaths are human activities in the pursuit of profit: the fishing industry, whose ropes and gear entangle and cut whales, eventually killing them; and the shipping industry, whose vessels collide with and kill whales. In addition to collisions, ships' propellers can also slice, mutilate, scar and/or kill whales. This WhaleNet photo shows an endangered North Atlantic right whale, which was sliced up by ship propellers and killed in 2006. Other causes of whale deaths include gas, oil and deep-sea mining<sup>xxiii</sup> industries; waterborne plastic waste; war and the war machine; strandings and climate change; all of which either kill whales outright or slowly.



Endangered North Atlantic right whale sliced by ship propellers and killed in 2006.  
Photo: WhaleNet / Wheelock College



*Orcas swimming in the oil spill next to the Exxon Valdez tanker, 1989.*  
Source: Canadian Journal of Zoology.  
Craig Matkin of the North Gulf Oceanic Society.

For example, as a result of the wreck of the Exxon Valdez tanker and 11-million-gallon<sup>xxiv</sup> oil spill in Prince William Sound, Alaska in 1989, half a million birds<sup>xxv</sup> and 22 Chugach Transient orcas died.<sup>xxvi</sup> A “single mistake on an oil tanker” set the Chugach Transient orcas on “a path toward inevitable extinction... Today, the Chugach Transient orcas are functionally extinct... 14 of 35 orcas of the resident pod were lost” as well.<sup>xxvii</sup> According to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Senior Biologist Gary Shigenaka, a 2019 study showed that, twenty years later, the “salmon-eating resident orca AB pod of Prince William Sound is not recovering as expected... [Scientists] are predicting their extinction.”<sup>xxviii</sup>

## Whale Offsets will pay Whale Killers

Just as forest carbon offsets pretend to pay loggers not to log (sometimes with appalling increases in deforestation);<sup>xxix</sup> whale offsets pretend to pay these whale killers not to kill whales. The supposition is that no industry is going to avoid killing whales if it means they will lose money. For example, even though shipping giant Maersk Line's operating revenue was \$39 billion, and their ships emitted 35.5 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> in 2018 and may cause whale deaths, proponents of whale offsets think Maersk should be paid and receive "financial encouragement to optimize routes around whale migration paths."<sup>xxx</sup> Even though changing routes and traveling slower can contribute to fewer whale deaths, instead of simply having a legally binding speed limit for shipping and no-go zones to protect whales, the whale carbon offset scheme plans to pay corporations like Maersk to do so, so their profit margin is not affected. The hype is that the destroyers of Nature can make money and pretend to save the whales and the climate at the same time! Similarly, other probable whale killers, such as other shipping companies, cruise ship lines, oil and gas companies, the fishing industry, the military, plastics manufacturers and even countries that hunt whales like Japan could all potentially receive funds from whale offset schemes, not to harm or kill whales; even though their operations and pollution harm and kill whales.



Maersk ship with impaled whale.  
Rotterdam, 2012. photo: Maersk Line

## Whale offsets could speed up the extinction of whales

Putting Nature into carbon markets in the form of forest offsets also known as REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation), a model for whale offsets,<sup>xxxi</sup> has been an utter disaster for the climate, forests, Indigenous Peoples, forest-dwelling communities, human rights and even for some investors.<sup>xxxii</sup> Putting whales into the carbon market will be a disaster, too. In fact, it might even speed up whales' extinction by creating "perverse incentives."<sup>xxxiii</sup> Perverse incentives result when destroyers of Nature, such as logging companies, destroy more to raise the rate of destruction to get more carbon market money to supposedly not destroy.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Paying those that kill whales could result in perverse incentives to kill more whales to get paid more.

## Privatizing Nature

Just as to sell the carbon stored in a tree, a carbon trader may grab, own, privatize, control, guard, patrol, fence and/or maybe even militarize<sup>xxxv</sup> the forest and land where it grows for a hundred years<sup>xxxvi</sup> or more, to buy and sell the carbon stored in whales, a carbon trader may grab, own, privatize, control, guard, patrol and/or maybe even militarize whales and the oceans and coasts where whales live, migrate, feed, breed, calve and hunt.

## Planet Grab, Ocean Grab

The United Nations, countries, and "conservation" NGOs initially want to use "half the Earth's land and oceans"<sup>xxxvii</sup> for offsets under a variety of land and ocean grabbing umbrellas with names like Nature Based Solutions, Natural Climate Solutions and Global Deal for Nature.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Ocean-Based Climate Solutions specifically target the oceans, which cover 71% of the planet.<sup>xxxix</sup> The global carbon market's land grab seems to be dovetailing with the emerging global carbon market's ocean grab. What land, coasts and oceans are going to be left for the peoples of the world?



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## US Congress Ocean-Based Climate Solutions Act

Regardless of how farfetched whale offsets may seem, rapid strides are already being made to codify whale offsets and the inclusion of oceans in carbon markets<sup>xi</sup> into both national and international law. The Ocean-Based Climate Solutions Act in the U.S. Congress was introduced by Representative Raul Grijalva (D-Arizona) on World Oceans Day, June 8, 2021.<sup>xii</sup> On page 9, the Act proposes to: “Assist in exploration of the potential for a market for carbon credits.” On page 10, it aims to: “Develop and use protocols for inclusion of blue carbon projects [including whale offsets] in carbon markets.” Carbon markets are not just national, they are also international. Which brings us to the United Nations climate change Paris Agreement, the international instrument that serves to link regional and national carbon markets and build the global carbon market.

## Include whale offsets in the objectives of the United Nations Paris Agreement?

The International Monetary Fund’s study, “Nature’s Solution to Climate Change - *A strategy to protect whales can limit greenhouse gases and global warming*” concludes that whale protection must now become a top priority in the global effort to tackle climate change. “Since the role of whales is irreplaceable in mitigating and building resilience to climate change, their survival should be integrated into the objectives of the 190 countries that in 2015 signed the Paris Agreement for combating climate risk.”<sup>xiii</sup> Some see the next climate summit as just the place to do so. “With a carbon market for whales now a real possibility, perhaps it's time to put these creatures on the [UN climate change] agenda.”<sup>xiiii</sup>

## The elephant offset in the room

Other big mammals are also slated for inclusion in the carbon market. Elephant offsets are also being proposed by the International Monetary Fund.<sup>xlv</sup> The IMF and the United Nations need to be told to keep their hands off of whales, elephants and Nature as a whole.

## Who?

Some of us think of Greenpeace as the champions of saving the whales but Greenpeace-UK includes promoters of whale offsets as “Sources and further reading” on its webpage.<sup>xlv</sup> Although critical of some individual forest carbon offset projects,<sup>xlvi</sup> a Greenpeace report calls for a carbon tax,<sup>xlvii</sup> which is “a type of carbon pricing,”<sup>xlviii</sup> a form of emissions trading and carbon markets. So, it is up to us to save the whales from the carbon market. It is easy to feel overwhelmed, but that is a luxury we can’t afford. The luminous and renowned Native human rights and environmental activist Nilak Butler once said “We can’t allow ourselves to be confused or feel powerless... Each of us has something we can bring to strengthen Life’s circle.”<sup>xlix</sup> Take heart! The good thing about false solutions to climate change is that they are so absurd that once we see through them, we can stop them. Help save the whales from the carbon market. Share this information and your outrage. Denounce carbon trading and offsets of any kind by any name. Demand emission cuts at source and a new paradigm. The whales are counting on you.



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*This is an excerpt from Cassandra’s forthcoming book, CLIMATE OPIUM, which explores how we are overdosing on false solutions to climate change and why the Paris Agreement is a crime against humanity and Mother Earth. Thanks to the Swift Foundation, the CLIMA Fund and Global Justice Ecology Project for their generous support. Opinions and views expressed are solely the author’s own and do not necessarily express those of these gracious supporters.*





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# SAVE THE WHALES... from the carbon market!



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**“The council's decision to sell carbon credits is for one hundred years** and the membership should have had an opportunity to give input. The long term commitment will affect future generations and these decisions are a [concern for] membership as a whole not by the few.” [Emphasis added.]

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