

Greenpeace comments on the standard letter sent out by the Japanese Embassy in response to letters from the public protesting at Japan's so-called 'scientific' whaling

October 2000

Thank you for your letter to the Prime Minister. We appreciate your interest in whales and we are open to discussion on this subject.

If your protest is along the lines of "protect the endangered whale species", we are on the same ground. Japan strongly supports the international protection of endangered whale species such as blue whales. Regarding Japanese research on whales in the western Northern Pacific, it is true that it involves an annual sampling of 100 minke whales, 50 Bryde's whales, and 10 sperm whales. But, this level of sampling does not pose any risk to the current status of the whale stock. Minke whales have a population of 25,000, Bryde's whales have 22,000, and sperm whales number 102,000 in the research area. They are by no means endangered.

Both Bryde's and sperm whales were heavily exploited in the past and their current status remains unknown. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) classifies sperm whales as being vulnerable and ascribe the status category 'data deficient' to Bryde's whales as there are too little data to make a meaningful assessment. All whale population estimates are highly approximate due to the inherent difficulties in their calculation and are often the subject of much controversy in the IWC Scientific Committee. This year for instance the IWC Scientific Committee reviewed the population figure that Japan had been attributing to the Southern Ocean minke for the last 10 years and concluded that the real figure was likely to be 'appreciably lower'. As a result of this uncertainty scientists are unable to determine whether these populations of whales are increasing, decreasing or stable.

Most cetacean populations have a potential to increase at a rate of 1-7%.

They also have a potential to decrease. It may be that these populations are in fact declining, we simply do not know.

Japan refers to their North Pacific programme as a two year 'feasibility study' which clearly implies that after next year's hunt, it intends to return to the North Pacific to kill even more whales.

We are rather concerned that certain NGOs are misinforming the public on this and this could make our dialogue difficult. For example, this activity is not commercial whaling (although some NGOs state differently).

When Japan started so-called 'scientific' whaling in 1987, Japan's domestic press reported that the programme was intended as a means of keeping

the industry alive and the domestic market supplied with whale meat until a way could be found to reverse the moratorium decision.

The research employs both lethal and non-lethal research methods and is carefully designed by scientists to study the whale populations and ecological roles of these species. We limit the sampling to the lowest possible numbers to enable us to obtain meaningful scientific results.

Meaningful to whom? The IWC's Scientific Committee has never requested the 'research'. The IWC has agreed that gathering information on interactions between whales and prey species *"is not a critically important issue which justifies the killing of whales for research purposes"*.

The research plan and its results are annually reviewed by the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Committee (IWC). The IWC has never concluded that non-lethal methods can replace our research.

The programme is carefully designed to require the killing of whales. There is no reason why valid research could not be done without killing whales. All over the world whale scientists are helping increase our knowledge, but none, bar those at Japan's Institute of Cetacean Research, deem it necessary to kill whales for their research.

Nonetheless, Japan is committed to strengthen non-lethal elements of the research.

The non-lethal elements are simply a smokescreen for the killing of whales. Japan has made it clear that no matter what non-lethal techniques are developed, it intends to go on killing whales in the name of 'research'.

The research take is not a violation nor an abuse of a loophole in the international convention. This is a legitimate right of the contracting parties under Article VIII of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW). Whale meat is sold in the market, but this is a requirement set out in Article VIII of the ICRW.

It is not true that Article VIII of the Convention contains a requirement to sell whale meat in the commercial market.

Also, the sale of whale meat does not create any profit in Japan's case. A non-profit research institute, which carries out this research program, sells the bi-product in order to cover a portion of its research cost. The rest is covered by government subsidy.

The Institute for Cetacean Research may technically be a non-profit organisation but its annual turnover is in the region of 6.8 billion yen (about US\$ 64 million). What this account of the industry deliberately omits is the fact that the products of Japan's so-called 'scientific' whaling

retail for about three times their wholesale value, generating profit for all the businesses involved. Whale meat is a luxury food item consumed by only a small percentage of Japanese people. As the numbers of whales Japan catches increases, so do the profits. Both Bryde's and sperm whales are significantly larger than minke whales which explains Japan's interest in targeting these new species.

It is premature to conclude that the "world" is against whaling.

Over a million people world-wide have signed Greenpeace's petition for a global whale sanctuary and a recent poll in Japan has revealed that only 11% of the Japanese public strongly support whaling and an equal percentage oppose it.

It is true that anti-whaling nations support the ban on whaling at the IWC but a fair number of nations are of a different opinion. At the CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) meetings in 1997 and 2000, about 40-50% of the countries supported our proposal.

As Japan has been unable to get what it wants in the IWC, it has put considerable resources into soliciting support elsewhere, including substantial lobbying of CITES member countries. Of the 146 countries that are parties to CITES only about a quarter are also members of the IWC. Many countries are therefore not necessarily well informed about whaling or understand why the IWC has primacy over CITES in matters relating to whales and whale management. Despite its efforts, Japan only managed to secure 40.5% of countries voting in favour of one of its four proposals to reopen the trade in whale meat, the other three proposals did not even reach 40%. Japan never obtained a 50% vote as claimed. Given that not all CITES members voted, the percentage of CITES countries that actually support Japan is far lower.

Japan has also effectively bought the votes of a number of countries. In exchange for development aid, a number of countries (including six eastern Caribbean states) vote in line with Japan at both the IWC and CITES.

We ask you to realise that you may not have all the information on this topic. Finally, we would like to point out that whaling is no longer an issue of species conservation as it was in the 1970s, when several whale species had been over-harvested and the effective measures to protect the endangered species were awaited. The IWC did an outstanding job on this subject in the mid-1970s to protect blue whales and other endangered species, and Japan highly appreciates its effort.

Throughout the 1970s Japan repeatedly violated quotas and made meaningless the management procedures that the IWC then had in place. For instance when in 1973 the IWC voted in favour of establishing a quota of 5,000 for the Antarctic minke whales, Japan filed an objection and set itself a much higher quota.

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From objecting to the IWC decision to ban the hunting of blue whales in 1964 to blocking the creation of the South Pacific Whale Sanctuary at this year's IWC meeting, Japan has persistently undermined the IWC's attempts to conserve particular whale populations.

However, since the 1980s, the situation has changed, as non-endangered whale species also became protected by the IWC, despite the fact that the IWC Scientific Committee had calculated that some whale species were quite abundant. In the 1990s scientists calculated that the global whale population consumes 280-500 million tons of fish and crustaceans every year. This amount is 3-6 times as much as is fished by human beings world-wide.

The idea that Japan is trying to suggest in this statement is that whales are competing with commercial fisheries and should be culled for the benefit of fishermen. There is no scientific basis for this claim. Historically the oceans have supported large populations of both fish and whales. The critical state of many of the world's fisheries is the direct result of over-fishing, not over-predation by whales.

What these figures (produced by the Institute of Cetacean Research - the private organisation that actually conducts Japan's whaling operations) ignore is the fact that a very large proportion the food eaten by whales is not commercially valuable. In its literature, the institute claims that whales consume up to 269 million tonnes of seafood in the Southern hemisphere alone, but neither the baleen whales nor the sperm whales, which together account for most of this quantity, pose any threat to commercial fisheries. The baleen whales which feed in the Antarctic eat only krill which is of little commercial value, while the sperm whale feeds on squid that dive so deep humans cannot catch them.

The ecological relevance of the total protection of whales should be reviewed under these circumstances.

Sadly for the whales, the oceans have changed significantly in the past 50 years since the IWC first began attempting to manage whales. The effects of climate change, pollution, over-fishing, ozone depletion, capture in fishing nets and even ship strikes all threaten the health of the world's whale populations. However the factors that in the past led the commercial whaling industry to over-exploit whale population after whale population have not changed. In such circumstances the IWC's current moratorium must remain in place and Japan must stop its so-called 'scientific' whaling.

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