

Vote buying – Japan's chosen strategy to secure a return to large-scale whaling

Japan's agenda within the International Whaling Commission is self-evident – it wants a return to large-scale commercial whaling and is prepared to go to extreme lengths to achieve its goal. Unable to persuade the IWC to lift the current moratorium on commercial whaling, Japan has, since the early 1990s, been openly operating a "vote consolidation operation"¹ The primary purpose of this operation is to recruit new member states to the IWC that will vote with Japan in favour of commercial whaling. By targeting poor developing countries and offering substantial sums of development aid in exchange for votes at the IWC, Japan has already secured the support of seven countries.

Six East Caribbean states, (Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, St Kitts and Nevis), the Solomon Islands and most recently Guinea have all been successfully recruited and speak in favour of a resumption of commercial whaling and vote with Japan on all occasions.

As a result of this strategy Japan has already assembled a blocking minority within the IWC. This was demonstrated when the proposal to create a South Pacific Whale Sanctuary (SPWS) failed to achieve the 3/4 majority required to make a decision at the 2000 meeting of the IWC due to the votes cast against the proposal by the eastern Caribbeans. (Because of the requirement for a three quarter majority, each extra vote acquired by Japan neutralises three pro-sanctuary votes). The SPWS proposal has the support of all the range states in the region as well as the Pacific Island Forum and these countries have been effectively denied the right to determine whether whales are protected in their waters or not.

Aid-for-votes

The evidence which shows that Japan's granting of overseas aid (mainly in the form of fisheries aid) to these countries is directly linked to how these countries vote in the IWC has built up over time, and is most evident in the Eastern Caribbean.

In their first years of membership in the IWC, Antigua and Barbuda, St Lucia and St Vincent and the Grenadines were directly pitted against Japan, arguing for increased conservation and indeed all three countries voted in favour of the world-wide moratorium on commercial whaling in 1982.

St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines

On the eve of the 1986 IWC meeting and five years after they had first joined the IWC, St Lucia and St Vincent made an abrupt policy U-turn by deciding to support Japan and vote in favour of whaling. This occurred two weeks after

Prime Ministers John Compton of St Lucia and James Mitchell of St Vincent had been guests of the Japanese Government in Tokyo reviewing the economic relations between Japan and their respective countries and urging for Japanese aid and investment."² These two countries have been unflinching in their support of Japan ever since.

The year after their U-turn, each country received fisheries grant aid of approximately 290 million yen and many million more in the form of technical co-operation. Japan's granting of fisheries aid to these countries has continued in subsequent years. For instance, in 1995, St Vincent received 731 million yen for the construction of a fishery complex and a further 776 million yen in 1998 for another fishery construction project. From 1994 -1998 St Lucia received 2,938 million yen in grant aid for fisheries projects including the construction of the Viex Fort Fisheries Complex.³

During a 1990 visit to Japan for the enthronement of the new Emperor, Prime Minister Mitchell met with Fisheries Agency Director, General Kyotani. The Suizan Keizai reported that Mr Kyotani told Prime Minister Mitchell "' We are grateful that your country takes the same standpoint as Japan within the International Whaling Commission (IWC)', and asked that they continue to maintain the same position in the future. In response to this, Prime Minister Mitchell replied, 'In 1987-88 Japan provided us with free fisheries aid for construction of a fish market in our country's capital city Kingstown. This is still highly appreciated in our country, adding that on the whaling issue as well, 'we intend to continue asserting our present position by all means.'"⁴

As Japan has continued to provide fisheries aid to St Lucia and St Vincent so have these countries continued to vote in line with Japan in the IWC.

However the position adopted by these countries in the IWC has not gone uncriticised in the region. The Editor/Publisher of the Grenadian Voice, Leslie Pierre, has made the following statement on the whaling issue:

"The sad thing is that in their continuing effort to overturn the moratorium and sanctuary, the determined Japanese appear to have found more leaders than they have had previously at their beck and call to achieve their base end - leaders like those in the Windwards who have failed to say to the predators 'Yes we are in need, but we will not allow you to trample on the national pride of which we are only temporary custodians. We are not for sale for a few dollars more to build this fisheries complex or that road. Give us aid without forcing us to compromise our dignity'"⁵.

Dominica

The next country to join Japan's voting block in the IWC was Dominica, joining in 1992 just as France first introduced its proposal to establish the Southern Ocean whale sanctuary.

A member of the Commission in the early 1980s, Dominica had never participated in the meetings and had subsequently withdrawn. On rejoining in 1992 Dominica had to pay the IWC more than £25,000 in order to cover the debt

accrued from non-payment of membership fees from its previous years as a member in addition to the fees to give it voting rights at the 1992 meeting. When Dominica came to cast its vote at the meeting, it voted in line with Japan on all four votes that had a direct bearing on Japan's interests and abstained on the other four.

Two months later, in early September 1992, Dominica's then Prime Minister Dame Eugenia Charles paid an official visit to Japan where she was thanked during a meeting with her Japanese counterpart, Prime Minister Miyazawa, "for supporting Japan's bid to end a whaling ban". During the same meeting it was also announced that "Japan will dispatch a mission to the Caribbean island nation later this month to study contributing several hundred million worth of grant aid toward building a fishing complex"⁶, according to a Japanese foreign Ministry spokesman.

A year later, a Japanese fisheries newspaper reported that "free capital co-operation" of up to 617 million yen would be given towards "carrying out coastal fisheries development plans", primarily a new fishing port and market in Dominica's capital city Roseau.⁷

Another Japanese press article in 1993 recounted the visit of a "government representative of Dominica" (the IWC Commissioner that year) to the Japanese whaling town of Oshika. In the article the Dominican was reported as having "expressed support for Japan, saying, 'a small country like ours has occasion to request economic assistance from Japan, but at the IWC, we have a vote equal to a big country,' and made the townspeople happy."⁸

Japan has continued to give substantial sums in fisheries and other aid to Dominica, including 510 million yen in 1998 for the rehabilitation of the Roseau Fishery Facility.⁹

Dominica's voting history in the IWC since 1992 shows that it has consistently voted in favour of commercial whaling and in line with Japan. In fact, since 1997 Dominica's voting tally has exactly matched Japan's. In 1999 Dominica together with the other Caribbean countries even joined Japan in a staged walkout over a resolution which invited Japan to reconsider a quota of Dall's porpoise despite the fact that this species does not occur in the waters of any of these states.

The extent of Japan's leverage over Dominica was made explicit by events at the 2000 IWC meeting in Adelaide. Prior to the meeting, the Dominican Cabinet had agreed to abstain on the proposal to establish a South Pacific Whale Sanctuary, a position reflecting that there was a difference of opinion within the Government at that time. However when it came to the actual vote the Dominican delegate voted with Japan against the sanctuary having received direct instructions from the then Prime Minister, the late Roosevelt Douglas overruling the Cabinet decision. This led to the immediate resignation of the Minister of Environment, Planning and Agriculture and Fisheries, Atherton Martin. A note, dated 4th July 2000, explaining his resignation was circulated outside the IWC meeting in which Atherton Martin stated that he believed that the Dominican government was being held to ransom by Japan.

"I am also alarmed at the fact that the Japanese appear to be using the SAME promise of aid that held the James Administration ransom, to manipulate this government's voting at the IWC. This is undignified and unacceptable and must be resisted."¹⁰

Mr Martin subsequently told the Times newspaper that Japanese officials had visited Dominican Prime Minister in the lead-up to the Adelaide meeting and had threatened to withdraw aid for a new fisheries complex if Dominica abstained on the crucial sanctuary vote. He also added that the other five eastern Caribbean islands had "succumbed to the same extortionate tactics of Japan".¹¹

Despite the furore surrounding Atherton Martin's resignation the Japanese press reported in September 2000 that Prime Minister Douglas had, on a visit to Japan promised the Japanese Prime Minister, Yoshiro Mori, that Dominica would continue to support Japan over its position on whaling. The same article also reported that when the Prime Ministers had met, Douglas had asked for Japan's assistance in boosting Dominica's economy, particularly in the areas of agriculture, tourism and fisheries.¹²

The sudden death in October 2000 of Prime Minister Douglas means that Dominica now has a new Prime Minister, Pierre Charles, who will have the opportunity to support the South Pacific countries in their efforts to secure the SPWS when the proposal is put before the IWC for a second time at this year's meeting in July.

Grenada

Grenada didn't join the IWC until just before the 1993 meeting. At that meeting Grenada made its position crystal clear. Despite not having any previous involvement in discussions concerning the creation of the Southern Ocean Sanctuary, Grenada's opening statement stated categorically that "Grenada is...strongly opposed to the establishment of a specific sanctuary in the Antarctic." Fifteen votes were taken at the 1993 meeting and Grenada was alone among all the other members in voting the same as Japan on all fifteen votes.

According to one of Grenada's weekly newspapers, The Grenadian Voice, before the 1993 meeting Japan had "about 30 people in the Eastern Caribbean region lobbying for support for overturning the moratorium on whaling...spreading their largesse around."¹³

Grenada like the other Caribbean countries in Japan's voting block has been a recipient of large quantities of fisheries aid and other forms of technical assistance from Japan's ODA. The most recent statistics available show that Grenada received 299 million yen in 1994 towards the St George's Artisanal Fisheries Complex and a further 502 million yen towards the same project in 1995. In 1998 Japan gave Grenada 605 million yen for the construction for the Melville Street fish market.¹⁴

Grenada has continued to vote in step with Japan and the 2000 IWC meeting in Adelaide was no exception, with Grenada's voting record exactly matching that of Japan.

Antigua and Barbuda

From the early 1980s right through to 1995, Antigua and Barbuda was a staunch supporter of most conservation proposals put forward in the IWC and along with the overwhelming majority of IWC members voted in favour of the creation of the Southern Ocean sanctuary in 1994. All this was to change in early 1996 with a change of delegate.

Daven Joseph, Antigua and Barbuda's IWC Commissioner since 1996 is well known to regular attendees of Commission meetings for his frequent interventions in support of resumed whaling.

For instance when the Southern Ocean sanctuary agenda item came up for discussion at the last IWC meeting, the Antigua and Barbuda Commissioner began to berate the Australian and New Zealand proposal for the creation of a South Pacific sanctuary and continued in this vein even when it was pointed out that the Commission was not discussing the proposed sanctuary but an existing sanctuary.

"we are debating the Southern Ocean Sanctuary, we are debating the Pacific Sanctuary. Anyway a Sanctuary is a sanctuary is a sanctuary, that is what Antigua is trying to come from and that brings me to the third point on my submission Mr Chair where we have established so many sanctuaries around to protect whales that it is confusing us as to what these sanctuaries are actually doing ... We further went on to ask how will this effect our goal of of sustainable utilization of the whale resources and these questions so far have not yet been addressed so we do not believe that we are even in a position to discuss this matter." ¹⁵

Not surprisingly Antigua and Barbuda has also received considerable fisheries aid from Japan. In 1997 Japan gave 1,286 million yen for the construction of fish landing and distributing facilities in Saint John's.¹⁶

St Kitts and Nevis

In 1998 St Kitts returned to the IWC having been absent since 1992, but it was unable to vote as it was still in arrears to the Commission. Its account settled, St Kitts attended both the 1999 and 2000 meetings and cast its vote in identical fashion to Japan.

Inappropriate aid

Much of the fisheries aid supplied to the Caribbean has been of little use to the islanders. One Japanese-built fisheries complex on St Vincent has been empty for more than four years. Similarly the Roseau fish factory on Dominica is underused.

In an interview conducted by the BBC for its esteemed Newsnight programme, Lipson Tavernier, a Dominican fisherman expressed his opinion regarding this kind of aid from Japan.

"The Japanese doesn't benefit nothing. To me, I never see anything Japanese before. We need a place where we can get our things, we need ropes and things we can buy. We are looking for something we can go on and develop ourselves."¹⁷

Given the dubious value of the Japanese fisheries aid, the question remains why do the eastern Caribbean countries continue to vote with Japan in the IWC? Part of the explanation may lie in the fact that Japan regularly pays for officials from the islands to travel to Japan. A point elaborated by Atherton Martin when interviewed by the BBC:

"We are aware that there are several senior members of the fisheries divisions throughout the Caribbean who have developed 'a special relationship' with Japan. They travel to Japan. They are on the receiving end of enormous amounts of information..."¹⁸

Stepped-up offensive

Following the 1999 IWC meeting, Japan's Vice Minister of Fisheries, Mr. Hiroaki Kameya, announced that Japan was starting a program to use its Official Development Assistance (ODA) to assist developing countries to join the IWC to support Japan's position on whaling. Wire services reported on 3rd June:

'In a bid to gain support for commercial whaling, Japan hopes to coax developing countries to join the International Whaling Commission by giving them financial assistance, officials said Thursday.'¹⁹

The program was already underway at that time, following a visit by Vice Minister Kameya to Trinidad and Tobago earlier in the week. A week later, on 10th June 1999, a meeting of pro-whaling Diet members from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party agreed to focus on Trinidad and Tobago, Fiji, Zimbabwe and South Pacific countries. The meeting agreed a target of adding 13 more pro-whaling countries to the IWC so that countries favouring whaling would outnumber those who were opposed.²⁰

Vice Minister Kameya visited 3 African countries in August of 1999: Zimbabwe, Namibia and Guinea. A report of a press conference given by Kameya following his visit appeared in Suisan Keizai on 30th August. In the article Kameya was quoted as saying "' I requested the three nations to join the IWC from a perspective of sustainable use of marine living resources including whales. All agreed. Particularly, Prime Minister Cideme of Guinea showed his will to join by the next year's meeting by instructing an official in charge to join'"²¹. A press report which appeared the following day reported that Morocco and Mauritania were also 'positive to joining' the IWC²².

It appears that Japan is now reaping the benefits of this stepped-up campaign. Guinea attended its first IWC meeting in 2000. Guinea voted the same way as Japan on 6 out of the 8 votes, including casting a vote against the South Pacific Whale Sanctuary. (Guinea was absent for the other two votes.)

On 12th February 2001 Morocco became the latest country to join the IWC. It remains to be seen how it will vote at the 2001 meeting.

Consequences for the IWC

If Japan's vote buying offensive goes unchecked, the consequences for the IWC will be dire.

By recruiting more countries year on year, Japan will eventually gain a simple majority in the IWC. This will enable Japan to control administrative changes within the IWC that would be detrimental to the functioning of this international convention. For instance it would be in a position to change the rules of procedure, such as introducing secret ballots - something Japan has supported in other conservation fora including the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

Following this gradual erosion of the effectiveness of the IWC to its logical conclusion, Japan could eventually bankroll its way to a position where it is able to overturn the moratorium and the future for the world's remaining whales would then be very grim indeed.

¹ Yomiuri Shimbun 13th April 1993. This press article described the visit of Dominica's IWC Commissioner to a Japanese whaling town as "a product of the 'vote consolidation operation' by government and industry circles together."

² "Latin American Newsletters, Ltd.", 6th November 1986

³ Japan's Official Development Assistance - annual report 1999

<http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/summary/1999/index.html>

⁴ Suizan Kezai Shimbun, 16th November 1990

⁵ Cited in the Jamaican Gleaner 26th May 1999 The whales are safe by Peter Espeut. <http://www.go-jamaica.com/gleaner/19990526/cleisure/index.html>

⁶ The Japan Times, 3rd September 1992

⁷ Suizan Kezai Shimbun, 20th December 1993

⁸ Yomiuri Shimbun, 13th April 1993

⁹ Japan's Official Development Assistance - annual report 1999

<http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/summary/1999/index.html>

¹⁰ Memo from Atherton Martin to Mona George-Dill 4th July 2000

¹¹ The Times 14th August 2000 Whaling 'extortion' denounced by Robert Whyman in Tokyo

¹² Japan Economic Newswire, 12th September 2000, Dominica promises support for Japan's stance on whaling

¹³ The Grenadian Voice, cited in 'Foreign Report', (The Economist) 7th October 1993

¹⁴ Japan's Official Development Assistance - annual report 1999

<http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/summary/1999/index.html>

¹⁵ International Whaling Commission 52nd Annual Meeting Adelaide, 3-6 July. Verbatim record. March 2001.

¹⁶ Japan's Official Development Assistance - annual report 1999

<http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/summary/1999/index.html>

¹⁷ Transcript of Newsnight feature broadcast 20th October 2000, Buying votes from Dominica

http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/events/newsnight/newsid_994000/994511.stm

¹⁸ Transcript of Newsnight feature broadcast 20th October 2000, Buying votes from Dominica

http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/events/newsnight/newsid_994000/994511.stm

¹⁹ AP, 3rd June 1999 Japan urges support for whaling by Mari Yamaguchi, Tokyo

²⁰ Minato, 11th June 1999 Summary translation of article titled Official Development Aid (ODA)

²¹ Suisan Keizai, 30th August 1999, Kameya reports trip to African nations - three nations positive to join IWC

²² Minato, 31st August 1999, Co-operative position at international meetings. Namibia, Guinea, Zimbabwe Africa visit Kameya, Parliamentary Undersecretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries