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Japan pushes commercial whaling into the new Millenium

Commercial whaling has decimated whale population after whale population. The development of new technology in the first part of the twentieth century, such as the introduction in 1925 of the first factory ship, enabled the whaling nations to hunt whales in the vast seas that surround Antarctica. The same pattern of destructive over-exploitation that characterises all commercial whaling operations occurred in these Southern Oceans. It has been estimated that in the fifty years from 1925-1975 over 1.5 million whales were killed in total, the majority of these in Antarctic waters. Finally after decades of uncontrolled whaling and the resulting collapse of whale populations, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) agreed to an indefinite moratorium on commercial whaling which came into effect in 1986. Now, on the brink of the new millennium only one country is still killing whales in the Southern Ocean – Japan - and it does so in violation of international law.

Japan is intent on re-establishing a large-scale industry taking many thousands of whales per year and has launched a multi-pronged offensive to realise this aim. The Antarctic hunt is the thin end of the wedge.

Southern Ocean Sanctuary under threat

In 1994, even though the moratorium on commercial whaling was already in effect, the IWC (the international body responsible for overseeing conservation and management of global whale populations) decided to give the whales around Antarctica even greater protection by establishing the Southern Ocean Sanctuary (SOS). The purpose of the designation



was to ensure that commercial whaling would be prohibited permanently in the Southern Ocean (Japan has argued that by definition a moratorium

was never meant to be permanent) and recognised the great importance of the region to a large proportion of the world's whales. The near unanimous decision to create the SOS was passed by a vote of 23 to 1 with Japan the sole country voting against the proposal.

The SOS covers all the waters surrounding Antarctica and protects three quarters of the world's whales in their feeding grounds. It protects depleted populations of blue, fin, sei and humpback whales and also the only large population of great whales which has not been severely depleted by whaling - the Antarctic minke.

The idea of sanctuaries is not new. The world's first international whale sanctuary was established by the IWC when the organisation was founded in 1946. Called simply The Sanctuary, it covered a quarter of the Southern Ocean, an area of millions of square miles lying between South America and New Zealand. It protected whales until 1955 when, under pressure from the industry, due to falling catches in the Antarctic, it was 'temporarily' opened. Within a year it was producing a quarter of the total Antarctic catch and remained open until the IWC moratorium came into effect in 1986.

In 1979 the IWC agreed to establish the Indian Ocean Sanctuary which protects the breeding and calving grounds of some whale populations. Fifteen years later the SOS was created. The two sanctuaries, which join onto each other, are complementary ensuring that some whales at least have been granted permanent protection throughout their life cycle.



This coverage from the freezing waters of the Antarctic to the warm waters of the equator is vital to a comprehensive approach to whale conservation and protection. Most of the great whales are highly migratory, feeding in the nutrient rich waters of the Antarctic before making the long journey to tropical waters to give birth and suckle their young. They then make the long migration back to their feeding grounds.

Now plans are being developed to establish two further sanctuaries. Australia and New Zealand are proposing the South Pacific Whale Sanctuary (SPWS) and Brazil is proposing the South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary (SAWS). If accepted these sanctuaries would start where the Southern Ocean Sanctuary ends and, as whales rarely cross the equator, would mean that whales in the Southern Hemisphere could lead their lives in an area free of commercial whaling.

By continuing to hunt whales in the Southern Ocean Sanctuary, Japan is undermining the whole sanctuary regime. It aims to pressure the international community into abandoning the Southern Ocean Sanctuary and jeopardises the introduction of new sanctuaries.

'Scientific' only in name

In an attempt to give a thin veil of respectability to its whaling operations, Japan exploits a loophole in the IWC rules which allows countries to issue permits to kill whales for lethal research and claims that its whaling is for scientific purposes. However as all the whale meat from its so-called 'scientific' whaling ends up for sale on the domestic market, the fact that Japan's whaling is primarily a commercial activity is self-evident.

'Officially it [Japan] does not hunt whales, but kills about 300 a year for "research purposes" a cover as thin as the slices of sashimi that a "researched" whale inevitably becomes.'

– the Economist, October 25th 1997



When Japan's so-called 'scientific' whaling programme was launched in the Antarctic in 1987, Japan's domestic press reported that the programme was intended to keep the commercial whaling industry alive until the moratorium decision could be overturned. Each year since then the IWC has criticised the programme in a series of increasingly strong resolutions calling on Japan to stop whaling.

The programme known as JARPA (Japan's Research Programme in the Antarctic) is supposed to provide data for the management of whale populations, studying things like the age distribution of the population. The only use for such data is in setting quotas for a commercial industry. The programme fails to meet criteria established by the IWC and at a special workshop of IWC scientists, convened to review the programme after it had run for eight years, the group (which included Japanese scientists) agreed unanimously that the data from JARPA were *'not required for management'*.

The designation of the entire Southern Ocean as a whale sanctuary in 1994 prohibits the killing of whales for commercial purposes in the area (regardless of their population status) and so there is no possible need for the Japanese data. The real product of Japan's 'scientific' whaling is whale meat.

To call Japanese whaling 'scientific' brings both science and the scientific community into disrepute.



Commercial reality

Japan's whaling is managed by the Institute for Cetacean Research (ICR) which was established in 1987 as non-profit foundation with a donation of US\$ 10 million from the whaling industry and is sustained by a grant of approximately US\$ 9 million a year from the Government of Japan together with money derived from the sale of whale meat to the domestic market. In fact the ICR is itself a good-sized business: its 1996/7 balance sheet shows an income of 6.8 billion yen (about US\$ 64 million) and expenditures on public relations as well as whaling.

Each year the Japanese whaling fleet returns from Antarctica with nearly 2,000 tonnes of whale meat on board and this is then fed into the commercial distribution system. In 1997 ICR officials announced that the year's catch from the Antarctic, 1,995 tonnes, would be sold for 3.5 billion yen (US\$ 33 million dollars) and that it would retail for three times that amount. So an additional income of over US\$ 60 million dollars was generated in the distribution network.

Clearly Japan is still whaling for profit.

Illegal

Commercial whaling in the Antarctic, under whatever guise it is perpetrated, defies international law. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) provides that States must work through the appropriate international organisations for conservation, management and study of cetaceans. The IWC is the appropriate international organisation in this case. Every year the IWC passes a resolution calling Japan to stop whaling in the Southern Ocean Sanctuary and is ignored by Japan. (See the more detailed briefing 'Whaling in the Sanctuary – Illegal'.)



High seas whalers

On 9th of November 1999 Japan's whaling fleet set sail from the Japanese port of Shimonoseki for Antarctica with the intention of taking its self-allocated quota of 440 minke whales. The fleet consists of the 7440 tonne factory vessel, the Nisshin Maru, three catcher boats and a spotter vessel. This will only be the second Antarctic season for one of the catcher boats, the Yushin Maru. When it was launched last year it was heralded as a symbol for the reopening of whaling in Japan and was the first new catcher boat to be built by the Japanese in 26 years. The high-powered vessel represents a multi-million dollar investment by Japan's whaling industry and is proof that the industry has high hopes for a return to large-scale whaling.

Since beginning its 'scientific' whaling, Japan has been gradually increasing the extent of its operations. In 1995 it increased its Antarctic quota from 330 whales to 440 and during the 1996/7 whaling season expanded the area in which the fleet operated. Following the moratorium JARPA was at first confined to Antarctic Area V (the Western South Pacific) but now also ventures into Antarctic Area VI (the eastern South Pacific). In 1994 Japan started a second research programme in the North Pacific (JARPN) where it has killed a further 499 whales over the last six summers.

The table below shows the number of whales killed by Japan's 'scientific' whaling programme in the Antarctic since the moratorium came into effect.



Japan's catch in the Antarctic (JARPA)

87/88 273

88/89 241

89/90 330

90/91 327

91/92 288

92/93 330

93/94 330

----- Sanctuary comes into effect

94/95 330

95/96 440

96/97 440

97/98 438

98/99 389

Total 4156

So far Japan has killed 4,655 whales under the guise of 'scientific' whaling since the IWC moratorium came into effect. 2,037 of these have been taken from within the Southern Ocean Sanctuary.

The thin end of the wedge

Japan wants nothing less than a return to large-scale high seas whaling. The Antarctic hunt is just one element in multi-pronged offensive to achieve that aim.

For several years now Japan has been employing a vote buying strategy at the IWC that is proving highly effective. Japan directly controls the votes of 6 East Caribbean states and the Solomon Islands. In exchange for fisheries aid these countries speak in support of resumed whaling and vote with Japan on all occasions. Newspaper coverage and private



communications from Japan indicate that it intends to step-up this vote-buying programme and believes it can win the whale conflict at the IWC through this method. A target of 13 new countries has been set to provide Japan with a majority of votes in the IWC in favour of whaling. Targeted countries include Trinidad and Tobago, Fiji, Guinea, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Morocco, Mauritania and some South Pacific islands.

This programme is already well underway. Japan's Vice Minister of Fisheries, Mr Hiroaki Kameya is known to have made visits to Trinidad and Tobago straight after the last IWC meeting in June and to Zimbabwe, Namibia and Guinea in August. The Japanese press reported on 30th August that all three African countries have confirmed that they will join the IWC and another Japanese article stated that both Morocco and Mauritania were 'positive to joining the IWC'.

Japan not only wants to resume large-scale whaling but like Norway (the only other country commercially whaling) also aims to reopen the international trade in whale products. Historically such trade has always acted as a catalyst for illegal trade and should the current trade ban be overturned there will be an inevitable explosion of pirate whaling.

Following the IWC moratorium on commercial whaling CITES, (the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora), recognising the primacy of the IWC in all matters of whale management, placed all the great whales on its Appendix I effectively banning all international trade in whale products. Subsequently Japan has lobbied intensively at CITES to 'downlist' certain whale populations, i.e. remove these from CITES Appendix I to allow trade, and also to break the links between the IWC and CITES. The next meeting of CITES takes place in Nairobi in April 2000 and Japan has put forward downlisting proposals for the Southern hemisphere population of minke whales, the Okhotsk Sea, west pacific population of minke whales and the Gray whale



population of the Eastern North Pacific. The same countries employed by Japan in the IWC will be working alongside Japan at the next meeting of CITES.

Japan has also sought to undermine the authority of the IWC by convening a number of meetings purportedly to discuss, among other things, the formation of a regional organisation for the study and management of marine mammals, including whales, of the north-western North Pacific. The IWC representatives of Russia, China and the Republic of Korea have attended the Tokyo meetings. At a press conference this January, the director of the ICR referred to one of these meetings which took place in October 1998 as an "epoch making event", providing a "countermeasure to the IWC which is not functioning as a resource management organisation". As yet no organisation has been established.

Eating whale meat was a localised activity in Japan until after World War II when it became far more widespread as a result of shortages of other foodstuffs. (Prior to this the main product of Japan's Antarctic whaling fleet had been whale oil not whale meat.) Then, as now, eating whale meat was actively promoted through the school lunch system. This year the Institute of Cetacean Research supplied 32 tonnes of whale meat from the North Pacific catch to Japanese schools.

Urgent political action needed

If the international community fails to put pressure on Japan to stop whaling now it will only be a matter of time before the hard won victories for whale conservation are overturned and whales are once again being killed in their tens of thousands. Furthermore Japan's whaling defies international law and is eroding the very principles of international governance.



The United Kingdom has long fought within the IWC to ensure that the whales receive the protection they require and played a pivotal role in negotiating and agreeing the Southern Ocean Sanctuary. In recent years, the United Kingdom has played an active role in promoting the conservation of Antarctica, and in Antarctic scientific research, and as a G7 nation the United Kingdom wields great influence within the international community. The UK must demand at the very highest level that Japan immediately stops whaling in the Southern Ocean Sanctuary.

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