

JAPAN RESPONDS TO CRITICISM OF ITS WHALE RESEARCH PROGRAM

Thursday, August 3, 2000.

The Government of Japan's Fisheries Agency today responded to criticism of its whale research program. Masayuki Komatsu, Counselor for Fisheries Policy of the Fisheries Agency, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries said: "It is unfortunate that the politicians in the United States, the United Kingdom and New Zealand have criticized Japan's whale research program. In doing so they have chosen to ignore science and international law as a result of pressure from certain radical, non-governmental environmental organizations".

Mr. Komatsu noted that Japan's whale research program is perfectly legal under Article VIII of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling and that the program had been subject to extensive review by the IWC's Scientific Committee. Mr. Komatsu said "The Scientific Committee has praised Japan's past research programs and we are always open to constructive suggestions to improve the research."

Komatsu also expressed his view that "Threats of sanctions against a perfectly legal and scientifically sound program are a provocative and inappropriate attempt to impose their values on others by force. It is comparable to a situation where India demands the USA to stop eating beef by suggesting economic sanctions."

He also pointed out that the Convention requires that the by-products be processed. "The fact that whale meat ends up on the market is a requirement of the Convention to ensure that resources are not wasted. It is not a "loophole" or "illegal" or "commercial whaling in disguise" as the anti-whaling rhetoric suggests."

Komatsu emphasized that "since the Convention requires that its regulations be based on scientific findings, rather than condemning the research, all members of the IWC should be conducting similar research." "Criticism of the research in which more than 100 samples and measurements are taken from each whale is a rejection of the basic principle that resources should be managed on a scientific basis", said added.

Japan's whale research fleet left port on Saturday in order to begin a new research program which will focus on feeding studies of whales and ecosystem modeling. It is becoming clear that whales are eating 3 to 5 times of marine living resources than fisheries catch by humans.

Japan has conducted a whale research program in the western North Pacific from 1994 to 1999 under Special Permit as provided for under Article VIII of the Convention. The program had two main objectives: the study of population structure of minke whales and the study of feeding ecology of minke whales. The program was reviewed by the IWC's Scientific Committee each year and at a meeting held in February 2000.

Since some scientific issues remain outstanding from the 1994-1999 program, the program is being compiled in accordance with the recommendations of the scientific committee of the IWC. Minke, Bryde's and sperm whales will be included as part of the research. The priority for the research will be feeding studies related to prey consumption by cetaceans, prey preferences of cetaceans and ecosystem modeling. The program involves both lethal and non-lethal research techniques such as sighting surveys and biopsy sampling.

Other research objectives include the study of stock structure of minke, Bryde's and sperm whales as well as the study of environmental effects such as chemical pollution on cetaceans and the marine ecosystem.

Mr. Komatsu explained that minke, Bryde's and sperm whales were selected for this research since they are likely major components of the large whale biomass in the region and because their populations are abundant. "Contrary to the myths promoted by some conservation and environmental groups, not all whales are endangered in fact many are abundant", said Komatsu.

The research program is planned as a feasibility study for the years 2000 and 2001. A maximum of 100 minke whales, 50 Bryde's whales and 10 sperm whales was to be sampled in each of these two years however, the research catch for this year has been reduced because of the late start of the program. Mr. Komatsu noted that the research would provide valuable data and information to the Scientific Committee and that "It is certain that this small take from abundant stocks will not have a negative impact".

Mr. Komatsu explained that many international fisheries organizations have urged the development of multi-species management systems. This means that predator-prey relationships among the major components of an ecosystem must be understood. Prey consumption by cetaceans is therefore the main part of the proposed research. Prey consumption and prey preference data will be used as input for ecosystem models.

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