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MEDIA RELEASE

2 December 2002

JAPAN RESPONDS TO SEA SHEPHERD ACCUSATIONS

The founder of the Sea Shepherd Society, Paul Watson, "is a thug and a terrorist who has left only lies and deception in his wake."

Mitsuyoshi Murakami, the Executive Director of Japan's Institute of Cetacean Research, was responding to Paul Watson's accusations aired on TVNZ's "Sunday" programme on 1 December 2002.

Sea Shepherd's "Farley Mowat" is bound for the Antarctic soon aiming to disrupt Japan's whale research program. Mr Murakami said, "despite his claims to the contrary, the record is clear. Watson is a criminal who has intentionally rammed a number of vessels, and served time in jail. Any activities that would interfere with the operations of our research vessels in the Antarctic are a threat to the lives of crew and scientists and are beyond legitimate protest. The sinking of vessels by Watson are the acts of a terrorist and he should be treated like one."

He has been convicted of offences on numerous occasions, including the 1983 conviction in Quebec, Canada, for interfering with the annual seal hunt. He served 15 months in prison. Watson was also convicted for the 1992 attempted scuttling of the Norwegian combined whaling and fishing vessel "Nybræna". He was arrested at Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam, Netherlands, by Dutch police after Interpol issued a warrant and was held in custody in the Netherlands. Watson admits to having sunk a number of vessels.

In 1994, the Sea Shepherd Society had its observer status at the International Whaling Commission revoked. IWC Secretary, Ray Gambell, declared at the time that the IWC and all its member states ardently condemn Sea Shepherd's acts of violence.

Mr Murakami said that Watson's claims that Japan's whale research in the Antarctic is illegal are "simply untrue". Article VIII of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW), explicitly provides that member countries may issue permits for scientific research. He said this was important because the ICRW requires that the IWC's regulations be based on scientific findings.

Mr Murakami also emphasized that the IWC's Southern Ocean Sanctuary specifically does not apply to research and that the Convention requires that the byproducts of the research – the meat – be processed.

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“The explicit nature of the ICRW to allow for scientific whaling, as well as the requirement that the meat from such research be processed to the greatest extent practicable, demonstrates this is not a ‘loophole’ and shows Japan is following the ICRW to the letter. That meat ‘ends up on dinner tables’ is a requirement of this international treaty, not contrary to it.”

Mr Murakami said it needed to be remembered that the IWC agreed a “moratorium” in 1982 following a call by some member states that there was not enough scientific information to continue commercial whaling. Since then, Japan’s research has received strong support from the IWC’s Scientific Committee.

The program continues to make major contributions to understanding the biology of whales in the Antarctic. It involves non-lethal research, including sighting surveys and biopsy sampling, as well as a take of whales for research that cannot be effectively done by non-lethal means. This includes examination of earplugs for age determination studies, reproductive organs for examination of maturation, reproductive cycles and reproductive rates, stomachs for analysis of food consumption and blubber thickness as a measure of condition. The number of minke whales taken (440) is the smallest number required to obtain statistically valid results.

“Contrary to the claims of anti-whaling interests, the Scientific Committee of the IWC has commended Japan’s research program noting that it is providing valuable scientific information required for the management of these resources,” Mr Murakami said.

The Scientific Committee says the research has made “a major contribution to understanding of certain biological parameters” and that “the information produced has set the stage for answering many questions about long-term population changes regarding minke whales in the Antarctic,” Mr Murakami said.

**For more information, contact
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