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MEDIA RELEASE

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WHALE MEAT

The Institute of Cetacean Research (ICR) says a minuscule amount of whale by-product caught through Japan's research programs in the Antarctic and western North Pacific or residuals from non-IWC regulated whaling ends up as pet food.

The Institute today sought to debunk the latest falsehoods and incorrect assumptions made by anti-whaling lobbyists and members of the media. "The way in which this story has been spun by anti-whaling lobbyists through naïve journalists who didn't check their facts demonstrates the lack of objectivity that some media have when it comes to whaling," the ICR's Director General Dr. Hiroshi Hatanaka said today.

"This is an indictment on western media who do not question the information they receive on whaling and instead further reinforce falsehoods and wrong assumptions. It is the public that loses through receiving false information," he said.

Pet food

The particular sale of whale meat for pet food referred by the journalists was carried out by a company near one of the traditional small-type whaling bases on the Boso Peninsula, south east of Tokyo. This was sold as a jerky-type product and was made from less than 100kg of a batch of Baird's Beaked whale, which the processor received from a local whaling company.

Baird's Beaked whale is not one of the species regulated by the International Whaling Commission and is not included in the ICR's research programs. The sustainable management of this particular species of whale is regulated by the Government of Japan's Fisheries Agency.

"The whale meat used for the pet food was "hyakuhiro" – the small intestine of the whale commonly referred to as tripe – and other cheaper cuts that are not utilized for human consumption," Dr. Hatanaka said. Similarly, a small percentage of whale by-products from the research programs, ie some leavings after processing, that are not utilized for human consumption are also processed for the pet food market. This accords with the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW) where it states that whales taken under the research provisions "shall so far as practicable be processed".

"As with other meat industries, such as cattle and sheep slaughtering for instance, not every part of the whale – intestines, some organs, etc – is appropriate for human consumption and these parts are processed for the pet food market."

(more to follow ...)

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“To suggest, as these groups have done, that fine cuts of whale meat from Japan’s research programs is being turned into pet food because Japan has a glut of it is not true,” Dr. Hatanaka said.

Stocks of whale meat

The distribution of frozen whale meat from the research programs is highly regulated. The price range that Japanese consumers are expected to pay is set by the Government and the supply to the market is kept under tight control and drip fed to ensure that whale meat is available in selected areas throughout the entire year.

“Demand always exceeds supply. At any given time, there will be an amount of whale meat in storage to ensure supply is always available. Japanese are not losing their taste for whale, and if left to market forces, the price of whale meat would increase considerably and reach consumers at unaffordable prices,” Dr. Hatanaka said.

“The fact that the price of whale meat is well regulated by the Government means it is also affordable for some schools to reintroduce it as a protein-rich lunch option for pupils.”

The wholesale price of minke whale red meat is set at a fixed price of 1950 Yen per kilogram. The whale meat from the western North Pacific research is available to the public from mid-December onwards.

Dr. Hatanaka said anti-whaling lobbyists are told when the catch reaches storage and coincide their public relations campaign to falsely allege the augmented supplies mean whale meat is not in demand because there is a large amount of it.

“Obviously our stocks of whale meat increase when we start selling the by-products from the North Pacific after Government approval in December and again when selling by-products from the Antarctic in July. It is at these times that supplies of whale meat are at their highest,” Dr. Hatanaka said.

NB: Under the rules of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW) all whales taken through research programs must be processed to the greatest extent practicable. Japan processes the whale meat and sells it on the market. The funding obtained goes towards financing the following year’s research programs.

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Visit also: www.icrwhale.org

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