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MEDIA RELEASE

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SEA SHEPHERD ATTACKS WHALE RESEARCH VESSEL

The Dutch vessel "Steve Irwin" last night (26 December) committed an attack against the Japanese sighting vessel Kaiko Maru, currently engaged in whale research in the Antarctic.

Protesters from the Steve Irwin threw bottles of acid and bottles containing a bluish-green liquid at and onto the Japanese vessel. The Steve Irwin rammed the Kaiko Maru from the starboard rear side and spent a number of hours in dangerous close-quarter harassment of the Japanese vessel, repeatedly overtaking and circling the Kaiko Maru.

The incident occurred when the Kaiko Maru was undertaking a detour in the ice pack area after completing the day's research activities. The weather had deteriorated and fog had reduced visibility conditions to about 500m.

The Steve Irwin approached the Kaiko Maru from the starboard rear side and within two minutes the protesters aboard started throwing bottles, approximately 15 bottles of butyric acid.

After the ramming, the Dutch vessel pursued, repeatedly overtook and menacingly turned around the Kaiko Maru for approximately three hours, and thereafter changed course to the east where it disappeared from the Kaiko Maru radar.

The Kaiko Maru topside starboard rear bulwark was damaged by the Dutch vessel's ramming, although no hindrance to its present operation and research activities has occurred.

The Director General of the Institute of Cetacean Research (ICR) in Tokyo, Mr Minoru Morimoto, said that Japan's right to conduct research in the Antarctic was legally accepted by member countries of the International Whaling Commission. Article VIII of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW), explicitly provides that member countries may issue permits for scientific research.

"Sea Shepherd is a terrorist vigilante group that is operating outside of the confines of international maritime law. Their activity threatens the safety of our crews and scientists and should be condemned", he said.

Mr Morimoto said research on Antarctic whale resources is important because the ICRW requires that the IWC's regulations must be based on scientific findings.

Also visit: <http://www.icrwhale.org/gpandsea-img.htm>

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