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MEDIA RELEASE

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Completion of the 2011 IWC/Japan Joint Cetacean Sighting Survey Cruise in the North Pacific - IWC-POWER

1. BACKGROUND

The *IWC*[*]*/Japan Joint Cetacean Sighting Survey Cruise in the North Pacific* is a joint IWC/Japan collaborative program started in 2010 as a successor of the IWC/IDCR[**]-SOWER[***] cruises carried out since the 1978/79 season in the Antarctic Ocean.

The IWC-SOWER (1996/97-2009/10) and its forerunner, the IWC/IDCR (1978/79-1995/96) programs, were conducted for 32 years long and made a huge contribution to estimating abundance of whale stocks distributing in the Antarctic, such as Antarctic minke whales, and elucidating the trends of whale stock abundance. Both are recognized as the most successful international collaborative research effort conducted under the auspice of the IWC. Japan has made a substantive contribution to conducting and operating these international whale research programs by providing research vessels and crew members from the beginning to the end.

This survey was the second research cruise in the North Pacific, following the first research cruise carried out last year. The research plan of this program reflects the major research agenda of the IWC Scientific Committee. During the 2010 cruise a number of fin whales and sei whales were sighted in the research area where a large scale sighting

[*] International Whaling Commission
[**] International Decade of Cetacean Research

survey had not been conducted for more than a half century.

The IWC Scientific Committee, at its annual meeting recently held in Tromsø, Norway, decided to name this research program as the IWC-POWER (Pacific Ocean Whale and Ecosystem Research).

2. OUTLINE OF THE 2011 RESEARCH CRUISE

The IWC-POWER program is conducted collaboratively by the IWC and the Government of Japan. The IWC Scientific Committee has developed the research program and an actual survey cruise plan was jointly planned by associated institutions such as the National Research Institute of Far Sea Fisheries, Fisheries Research Agency of Japan, and Alaska Fisheries Science Center, NOAA/NMFS, U.S.A. under guidance of the IWC-POWER Steering Group (Convener, Dr. Hidehiro Kato, Professor of Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology, Japan) which was established under auspice of the IWC Scientific Committee.

The Institute of Cetacean Research, under the commission of the Fisheries Agency of Japan, has completed the survey cruise. Followings are summary of research cruise plan and its results.

2.1 Objectives

(1) estimation of sei whale abundance (and other species where possible, especially fin whales);
(2) collection of information on stock structure, particularly biopsy samples, with priority given to sei, fin and sperm whales; and
(3) collection of photo-identification data and biopsy samples for rare species encountered, especially North Pacific right whales and blue whales.

2.2 Research Cruise Period

From July 11, 2011 to September 8, 2011 (sixty days).

2.3 Research Area (Fig. 1)

The research area is north of 40°N, south of the Aleutian Islands, and between 170°W and 150°W (eastwards), including the high seas and the EEZ of the United States of America.

2.4 International Researchers

Koji Matsuoka (Cruise leader, Institute of Cetacean Research (ICR), Japan)
Sally Mizroch (Alaska Fisheries Science Center, NOAA/NMFS, USA)

2.5 Research Vessel

*** Southern Ocean Whale and Ecosystem Research

Yushin-maru No.3 (742 ton)

2.6 Total Distance Covered

3,097.8 nautical miles (about 5,740km)

2.7 Whale sightings

Blue whale: 10 schools; 10 animals

Fin whale: 82 schools; 141 animals

Sei whale: 58 schools; 95 animals

Humpback whale: 76 schools; 133 animals

Sperm whale: 95 schools; 119 animals

2.8 Results of sample collections etc.

(1) Collection of biopsy samples

Blue whale: 4 animals

Fin whale: 12 animals

Sei whale: 31 animals

Humpback whale:1 animals.

These samples will be used for examination of stock structure of each species.

(2) Photo identification data

Blue whale: 9 animals

Fin whale: 25 animals

Sei whale: 27 animals

Humpback whale: 45 animals

These photographs are valuable information to study life history and migration patters of each species.

(3) Record of marine debris

Many marine debris were found near the Japanese coastal water which are likely to be the results of the tsunami caused by the Tohoku Region Pacific Coast Earthquake: Total of 132 cases (71 cases of fishing buoys; 23 cases of timbers; and refrigerators, tires, overturned small boats, etc.)

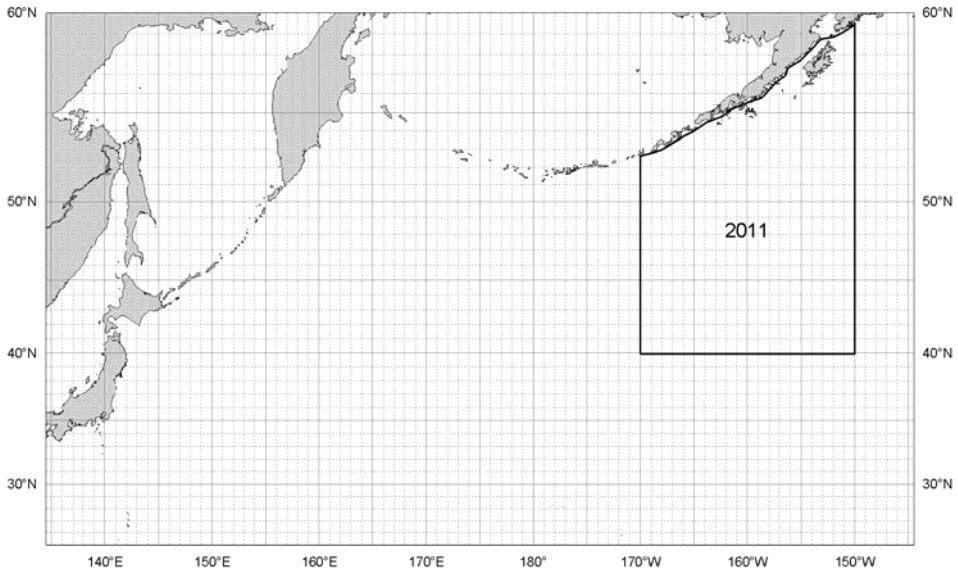

Fig.1 The research area for 2011.

Photos from the 2011 cruise

Photo 1. Biopsy sampling

Photo 2. fin whale, a biopsy dart just hit it.

Photo 3. Mother and calf pair of sei whale.