



THE INSTITUTE OF CETACEAN RESEARCH

TOYOMI SHINKO BLDG. 4-5 TOYOMI-CHO CHUO-KU TOKYO 104-0055 JAPAN

PHONE: +81-3-3536-6521

FAX: +81-3-3536-6522

www.whalesci.org

www.icrwhale.org

MEDIA RELEASE

28 February 2002

CRITICISM OF RESEARCH PROGRAM IS ANTI-SCIENCE

The Director General of the Institute of Cetacean Research in Tokyo, Dr. Seiji Ohsumi, today responded to criticism of its new research plan.

“Japan’s plan to increase its whale research program is based on urgent scientific need to collect data on the competition between whales and fisheries,” said Dr. Ohsumi. “It is estimated that whales consume 3 to 5 times the amount of marine resources as are caught for human consumption, so our whale research is providing valuable information required for improving the management of all our marine resources.”

“Research on the role of whales in the ecosystem and in particular the consumption of fish by whales is supported many international fisheries organizations including the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Even the IWC adopted a resolution last year making the study of interactions between whales and fisheries a priority.”

“Japan is simply doing what the IWC said was a priority,” Dr. Ohsumi said.

Over the past two years, a total of 140 minke whales, 93 Bryde’s whales and 13 sperm whales were sampled. The proposed program involves sampling of 150 minke whales, 50 Bryde’s whales, 50 sei and 10 sperm whales each year.

“These species were chosen because they are abundant in the north Pacific and they are very large animals – this means they consume huge amounts of marine resources,” he said.

“From a scientific point of view, we need to include Sei whales since they have the second highest biomass in the region following sperm whales. The planned increase in the number of minke whales to be sampled is required so that inshore areas where the competition between whales and fisheries is likely to be greatest can be sampled.”

Calculations show that the effect of the research catches on the abundance of whales will be negligible. Even with these catches, the stocks will continue to increase,” he added.

“Based on the success of the past research and increasingly strong support from international fisheries organizations, including FAO, for research to improve multi-species approaches to management, Japan is convinced that its research effort should be increased.”

(more to come)

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He explained: “The priority for the research is to determine what whales are eating, where and how much. This information along with oceanographic and fisheries data are required as input for ecosystem models that will improve fisheries management.”

Japan has conducted a whale research program in the western North Pacific since 1994 under Special Permit as provided for under Article VIII of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW).

Japan has submitted the research plan to the IWC Scientific Committee to continue its whale research in the North Pacific.

The proposal, which under IWC rules is supposed to remain confidential until after it has been reviewed by the Scientific Committee, has been leaked. Dr. Ohsumi said “this is just another flagrant violation of IWC rules by someone opposed to whaling and a demonstration of the continuing dysfunctional nature of the IWC. This research program that should be judged on its scientific merits rather than emotional rhetoric. The Scientific Committee has commented that our research is providing valuable scientific information.”

Dr. Ohsumi explained that the program includes both lethal and non-lethal research. He emphasized that the study of the diet of whales cannot be done using only non-lethal means. He also noted that comments from the Scientific Committee’s review of the proposed program would be considered following this year’s meeting of the IWC and before initiation of the program.

“It is important to understand that the proposed research is perfectly legal under the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling and that it has a sound scientific basis.”

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For further information see attached Background document and Questions and Answers

**For more information, contact Joji Morishita, Deputy Director of the Far Seas Fisheries
Division of Japan’s Fisheries Agency. Mr Morishita is currently at the
Ascot Metropolitan Hotel, Auckland, New Zealand
0064 9 300 8800**