

Tokyo's Statement on Scientific Whale Research

Contributed by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan
Wed, Aug 8, 2012, 06:17 PM

The Position of the Japanese Government on Research Whaling

What is Japan's position on the protection of whales? Recently, we received some strong objections to Japanese research activities on whales. We appreciate your interest in whales and we are open to discussion with people on this subject in good faith. What we would like you to bear in mind, however, is that you may NOT always be informed of all aspects of the scientific research on whales of Japan by certain NGOs and the media.

If the protest is along the lines of "protect the endangered whale species," we are on the same ground. Japan strongly supports the international protection of endangered whale species such as blue whales. Regarding Japan's whale research (as of 2002), it is true that it involves an annual maximum sampling of 590 minke whales, 50 Bryde's whales, 50 Sei whales and 10 sperm whales. However, this level of sampling does not pose any risk to the current status of whale stocks. According to the evaluation of IWC (International Whaling Commission) Scientific Committee in 1990, minke whales have a population of 761,000 in the Antarctic Ocean. Also, in the Western North-Pacific ocean, they have a population of 25,000. Bryde's whales, sperm whales and Sei whales have populations of 22,000, 102,000 and 28,000 respectively. Thus, they are by no means endangered.

We are rather concerned that certain NGOs and the media are spreading misinformation on this issue to the public to provoke an emotional reaction against our activities which could make dialogue difficult.

For example, this activity is not commercial whaling (although some NGOs have stated differently). The research employs both lethal and non-lethal research methods and is carefully designed by scientists to study the whale populations and ecological roles of the species. We limit the sample to the lowest possible number, which will still allow the research to derive meaningful scientific results. The research plan and its results are annually reviewed by the IWC Scientific Committee. The IWC has never concluded that non-lethal methods can replace Japanese research.

Nonetheless, Japan committed to strengthen non-lethal elements of the research.

The research take of whales is not a violation or an abuse of a loophole in the international convention. Quite the contrary, this is a legitimate right of the contracting party under Article VIII of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW).

Whale meat is indeed sold in the market, but this is a requirement set forth by Article VIII of the ICRW. Also, the sale of whale meat does not create any profit in Japan's case. A non-profit research institute, which carries out this research program, sells the by-product in order to cover a portion of its research costs.

It is a little simplistic and premature to conclude that the "world" is against whaling. It is true that anti-whaling nations support the moratorium on commercial whaling at the IWC, but the other nations are of a different opinion. In fact, in more recent years, more and more nations have come to support the idea of sustainable use of whales at the IWC meetings.

Finally, we would like to point out that whaling is no longer an issue of species conservation as was the situation in the 1960s and 1970s, when several whale species had been over-harvested and effective measures to protect the endangered species were urgently called for. The IWC did an outstanding job on this subject in the mid-1970's to protect blue whales and other endangered species, and Japan highly appreciates its effort. However, since the 1980s the situation has changed as non-endangered whale species also became protected by the IWC, despite the fact that the IWC Scientific Committee had calculated that some whale species were quite abundant. In the 1990's scientists calculated that the global whale population consumes 250-440 million metric tons of fish and crustaceans every year. This amount is 3-5 times as much as is fished by human beings worldwide. The ecological relevance of the total protection of whales should be reviewed under these circumstances. Anti-whaling does not automatically mean "green."

We appreciate your attention to this issue. At the same time, we hope the information above can be of help in understanding the comprehensive picture of Japan's position on whaling, which is often misinformed and misunderstood. Japan is always committed to participating in a constructive exchange of views on the whaling issue in good faith.

To view the entire press release, link here: