



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

<http://www.icrwhale.org>

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WHALE RESEARCH VESSELS RETURN TO PORT

(TOKYO) –

Japan's whale research vessels have returned to their home ports in Japan having completed the final year of an 18 year research program in the Antarctic. "We are pleased to welcome home the fleet. The research program has been truly successful having produced valuable information on the Antarctic ecosystem which will provide the basis for improving future research and a comprehensive management of Antarctic marine resources," the Director General of The Institute of Cetacean Research, Dr. Hiroshi Hatanaka said.

In 1982, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) adopted the moratorium on commercial whaling on the grounds of insufficient scientific knowledge concerning whales. In order to solve the scientific uncertainties and pave the way for the resumption of sustainable commercial whaling, Japan began a research program – the Japanese Whale Research Program under Special Permit in the Antarctic (JARPA) conducted under Article VIII of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling.

Dr. Hatanaka said the last 18 years of research in the Antarctic had provided a wide variety of important information on biological characteristics, such as natural mortality and changes in the age of maturity of minke whales, and other relevant factors necessary for sustainable management under a commercial whaling regime.

He also explained that there is a major shift occurring among baleen whale species where we are witnessing a surprisingly rapid growth in the abundance of fin and humpback whales in the Antarctic and a possible slowing in the increased abundance of minke whales. "Understanding this major shift as well as the effects of worldwide climate changes, including global warming, is required as the basis for ensuring sustainable use of these abundant resources," he said.

Results of the research program have been submitted to the Scientific Committee of the IWC every year.

He said "the results of the research programs will contribute to the establishment of a new and improved management system for whales, based on the ecosystem approach which would allow for conservation, recovery of depleted species and sustainable use."

Japan's whale research program has involved both non-lethal research such as sighting surveys and biopsy sampling as well as research that requires the take of minke whales. The International Whaling Commission's Scientific Committee reviewed the results of the

(more to follow)

program at its half-way point in 1997 and commended both the quality and quantity of data. The Committee noted that the program has “provided considerable data for improving the management of Antarctic minke whales.

“While opponents of sustainable whaling characterize our research program as ‘commercial whaling in disguise’ it has been pointed out at the IWC Scientific Committee that using only non-lethal means to obtain this information are unlikely to be successful in the Antarctic,” Dr. Hatanaka said.

Dr. Hatanaka reiterated also that the Convention requires the by-products of the research be processed. “The fact that the whale meat is sold is actually a requirement of the whaling treaty to ensure that resources are not wasted. Income from the sale of by-products (meat) is used to help offset the cost of the research.”

“Criticism of Japan’s whale research program based on emotional reasons ignores both science and international law and is a rejection of the basic principle that resources should be managed on a scientific basis,” he said. “Sustainable use and proper management of all marine resources should be based on scientific findings. Indeed, the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling requires that its regulations be based on scientific findings.”

Dr. Hatanaka said Japan’s whale research program is legal under the terms of the Convention, which provides that IWC member countries can issue permits for the killing of whales for research purposes. “The Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary and the IWC moratorium apply only to commercial whaling, and not to research.”

For further information

Contact: The Institute of Cetacean Research

Tel: +81-3-3536-6521 Fax: +81-3-3536-6522

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