

Japan Wildlife Conservation Society (JWCS)

Suehiro Bldg. 7F 2-5-4 Torano-mon Minato-ku, Tokyo 105-0001 Japan

Phone/Fax: +81-3-3595-1171 E-mail: jwcs@blue.ocn.ne.jp Web: <http://www.jwcs.org/>

Statement of JWCS on Issues of Re-opening of Commercial Whaling

English / Japanese

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Central Statement

We oppose re-opening commercial whaling.

Basic Concept on Issues of Re-opening Commercial Whaling

1 Re-opening of Commercial Whaling should not be Accepted from the Viewpoint of Basic Concept on Wildlife Conservation and Utilization

- 1-1 The natural ecosystem is composed of wild species and non-organic materials. It supports the natural environment for the continued survival of human beings in the present generation and also guarantees it for our future generation through species evolution through interspecies interactions. We recognize the mechanism and the function as the most fundamental value of wild species for human beings, that the presence of a diversity of wild species is a fundamental source for environmental richness toward our future re-generation in terms of materials, spirit and culture. On the other hand, the wild species are utilized as form of consumptive materials, such as meat and various daily goods, being separated from their origin, biological communities / natural ecosystem. However, in order to respect their fundamental value for human beings, consumptive utilization of wildlife as resources should be minimized. We should avoid consumptive use of wildlife as long as it is not be essential for our life or our survival.

At present, the demand for whale meat provided by commercial bases is extremely limited, either inside or outside of Japan. Whale meat had become a Japanese major food resources for protein in the whole country after the World War II ended, when it was provided to compensate serious food short. Huge quantity of it was consumed until during the 1960s. But its consumption has been decreasing as meat from domestic animals was increasingly provided. In 1985, just before commercial whaling was banned, whale meat production was only 0.4 % among all meat production in Japan. (ASAHI newspaper, Apr. 22, 2002) In 2001, even whale meat coming from the research whaling could not be sold out. (ASAHI newspaper) Today, whale meat has become one of the delicacies and is not popular or necessary in our daily life. From these points, there is no need for the commercial supply of whale meat and commercial whaling should not be re-opened or allowed.

- 1-2 Human beings have been largely modifying nature on the earth since they appeared and unfortunately they have been creating an artificial environment. Today, it causes enormous amount of extinctions of wild populations of fauna and flora all over the world, even on the species level rapidly. In order to conserve the natural environment for our future, it is necessary to preserve representative ecosystems and mother populations in sizeable numbers to be able to maintain viable wild species. As for all "great whales" which constitute the focus of IWC, a certain risk of extinction has been pointed out (see IUCN Red List 2000). The reality is showing that achieving the goal mentioned above is difficult. In addition, hunting pressure would definitely give a negative impact to the affected populations, because whale species require long gestating and nursing periods and also because they have not adapted to predation in their natural state. Commercial whaling has a tend to grow as a larger scale of business for monetary profit as company base due to the high

cost for production and maintenance among fishery industries. On the other hand, whale populations can easily be declined under whaling pressure.

These points suggest that commercial whaling should not be re-opened.

1-3 In order to guarantee the sustainable conservation of the natural environment for human beings and wild species into the distant future, it is essential to strictly preserve areas where diversity of biological nature and its evolutionary process are well maintained, without adding any artificial impacts.

The sea is the last fort for the remaining biological nature on the face of the earth while land ecosystems have been largely destroyed. In particular, in the high seas, beyond any national sovereignty, diversity of biological nature and its evolutionary processes are well conserved and it is the area where conservation efforts should be expected to continue for the future. We have to protect the high seas positively for the future, by prohibiting any human activity as far as possible. In particular, hunting of large whale species should be avoided, because they are key species in the marine ecosystem. From these points, commercial whaling in high seas should not be re-opened.

1-4 As far as non-commercial whaling for domestic consumption in limited cultural areas of the world are concerned, it would sometimes be acceptable. But this kind of whaling should be limited at a certain level with which the species populations could be stable for a long period. Also, in order to avoid enhanced commercial utilization from this limited whaling, it should be required that, such demand should be controlled effectively and that marketing circulation system should be managed without any loophole.

2 Background of the JWCS Statement

Whaling is a unique issue among debates for wildlife conservation and utilization in Japanese society because the debates was intentionally controlled or directed by the government, the industry and the academy for public attention.

Indeed, whaling had been a remarkable industry in the past, apart from wood industry, among all industries that depend on wildlife utilization. Whaling with factory ships in the high seas made nature to be socialized with a global scale and left serious impact to the global natural environment. However, it must be strange to the rest of the world that even now, the Japanese government still strongly insists on re-opening of whale hunting. Whaling industries had been substantially collapsed, and it would be impossible to re-build those industries with the same level of the past on the hunted numbers of whales remaining. It is quite difficult to point out why the governments, the industry and the academy do so. The insistence would not provide any positive factor to Japan's fishery policies and / or diplomatic policies. Indeed, they possibly consider survivals of the whaling department of the Fishery Agency, the foundation that accept a subsidiary from the government and the joint-stock corporation that holds the factory ship and whaling technical experts. But even this would not explain why the politics and whaling groups radically insist on the re-opening of whaling. They say that, they would like to keep their honor against their own false past: they had led corruption of the star national industries that contributed to accumulation of fishery capital and to saving food crises after the World War II without considering the inherent limit of whale as fishing resources. A series of excessive attitudes of the government and the whaling groups against foreign governments and citizen groups opposing re-opening commercial whaling as if the external pressure would have collapsed the industry reveal this tendency.

Japan's research whaling program, which was started by neglecting the IWC recommendations, has an intention to maintain whaling techniques and to keep the demand for whale meat, using the foundation and the corporation. Japanese agents said that they could obtain scientific data which would clarify whale population trends, by using methods of killing the animals. Those same methods have not been normally used for getting similar information on land mammals. It is impossible to justify the indispensability of obtained such data by killing the animals by using such an unusual survey methodology year after year.

Apart from this history of the Japanese government et al., their strong actions which constantly campaign for re-opening of commercial whaling impacts negatively on the policies and implementation of the Convention on international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora which regulates international commercial trades of wildlife as well as on the constructive conservation of whales in the International Whaling Commission. The Japanese government still strongly

demands at the CITES Conference of the Parties the continued heavy utilization of wildlife within the limits of “sustainability”, and considering wildlife as a consumptive resource. This approach is common to all the policies of the government of Japan for commercial utilization of wildlife, such as, ivory trade and hawksbill tortoiseshell trade. The governmental overseas funds for development aid (the Official Development Assistance) are used to influence the policies of economically developing countries. Those actions are targeted at reversing the current international conservation policies of wildlife to the old concept of resource utilization for economic development. This means that, the official delegation of Japan obstructs the international conservation efforts on biodiversity conservation of the global environment. In addition, these actions provide misunderstanding of the Japanese people as a whole and obstruct awareness as far as protection of the natural environment and wildlife conservation is concerned. In the 1990s, even in Japan, people started to develop a consciousness on protection and preservation of the global environment and to understand the importance of wild species which should be preserved for the future as components of a healthy natural ecosystem on which the human environment depends. However, those political actions regard whales as a food resource in the same way the species was regarded in the past. It means that the government has misled the Japanese people to believe that whales would have a value when they are separated from their biological communities.

Recently, the Japanese government started the propaganda that, minke whales damage the fishery and also disturb marine ecosystems because they eat too much fish. This opinion is based on a simple competitive relationship between human beings and whales in the use of fish resources. But the natural marine ecosystem is more complex than this. It cannot be said so simply that fishery products would decrease as minke whale population increases. The propaganda says that fish is eaten by whales but in reality, whale’s dead body is eaten by plankton, which form the basic source of fish food. While the strong desire of the government to create a new rationality to hunt whales avoiding the bind of IWC regulations created such a tactic propaganda, it diverts attention from basic knowledge of ecology and tends to obstruct again an appropriate recognition of environmental protection or wildlife conservation by Japanese people.

As a result, the campaign which is promoting commercial whaling has given negative impacts to promoting environmental protection/ wildlife conservation. This tendency is on the increase. There was an incident in April 2002 by the WWF Japan, that should contribute to nature conservation, which unveiled a statement that re-opening of commercial whale hunting can be acceptable based on current whale population.

Under those conditions, JWCS decided to show its basic concepts on issues of re-opening of commercial whaling, based on the understanding that, logic and actions of environmental protection/ wildlife conservation are facing a crisis in Japan.

3 The Continuous Ban on Commercial Whaling and the Conservation of Marine Ecosystem should be strengthened internationally

The International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW) was established as a protocol for international management of whales as fishery resources. At the same time, however, it also says, “Recognizing the interest of the nations of the world in safeguarding for future generations the great natural resources represented by the whale stocks”. We can understand that “natural resources” basically means fundamental renewable sources of biological material and spiritual / cultural environments for human beings including the future generations.

The following facts, since the convention was established, have moved major roles in ICRW and the International Whaling Commission (IWC) from the development of whaling industries in order to realize directly the policy framework of the convention stated above. The facts are:

- It has become clear that resource management of whales became difficult technically and costly since whale species population declined to a commercial level equal to a total ban..
- Worldwide whaling industries including those in Japan have been substantially collapsed and there is almost no possibility to re-develop them.
- International policies have been changed on the principle of utilization of marine natural resources through a series of international negotiations and agreements for the protection and preservation of the global environment. In particular, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982) regarded marine species as important components in the marine environment and clearly took protection and preservation of their habitat.
- According to the FAO report (2000), 75 % of the world’s fishery resources are fully or over exploited.

We can say that the present ICRW is internationally expected to have roles to conserve whales as key species in order to make preservation and recovery of marine ecosystem. On this point, we can highly respect that the IWC has kept strictly moratorium on commercial whaling.

From now on, the IWC should make more efforts to seek for the new way of whale utilization instead of hunting, while it reinforces the conservation policies and measures of whales to keep them to our future generations as the ecological components of it, which can strengthen protection and preservation of marine ecosystem. Namely, we expect that they would proceed constructive discussions to establish whale sanctuaries and creation and development of whale utilization without separating them from the biological communities / natural ecosystem, while it keeps the moratorium strictly.

Hideo Obara

President of Japan Wildlife Conservation Society (JWCS)

Masayuki Sakamoto

Secretary General of JWCS

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