



# Unfocused Snapshots - The Australian "Whale Research" Project

Editorial by Dr Janice Henke Anthropologist

**The much bally-hooed Australian/New Zealand whale research project is starting now, in early 2010, in Antarctic waters. The alleged purpose of this endeavor is to "prove" that whales do not need to be killed in order to be studied for conservation purposes. However, an objective look at both the Australian proposed study and the more than two-decade long Japanese whale research efforts in Antarctica should result in no doubts about the real intent of this latest venture. Australia and New Zealand have policies in opposition to the goals and intent of the whaling convention, and these nations actually wish to find ways to change that document so that the International Whaling Commission would, in effect, be only an organization to oversee non-consumptive use of cetaceans**

The International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling, or ICRW, states that any nation intending to take whales (and it was originally assumed that this was the primary reason why any nation would become a signatory to the Convention) should undertake scientific research in order to discover if any proposed harvest could be done in a sustainable manner. Sustainability of harvest is the original and only goal of the ICRW, the Preamble of which states, in part, "Having decided to conclude a convention to provide for the proper conservation of whale stocks and thus make possible the orderly development of the whaling industry.." In addition, Article V of the convention mandates that any changes to its Schedule (this means changes to the rules that members must follow) must be "such as are necessary to carry out the objectives and purposes of this Convention and to provide for the conservation, development, and optimum utilization of the whale resources;" (and) "shall be based on scientific findings". The last provision in Article V, 2 is that any changes in the Schedule "shall take into consideration the interests of the consumers of whale products and the whaling industry."

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Japan's goals are to document the age profiles, fertility, and nutritional health of whale species over time, so that trends in population status may be well known, and sustainable quotas may be determined. Data necessary for such analysis can not be collected by documenting numbers of whales seen during a six week study, by collecting discarded floating whale feces, or skin and blubber samples via darting techniques. The Australian "conservation" study shall not produce information useful in determining the age profile of any whale species, or the health and fertility of species over time. In addition, the Australian study shall result in very meager information on species population status.

Japanese research, in contrast, has resulted in well-documented age profiles of southern ocean minke and fin whales that indicate the populations are growing, as a high percentage of each is young animals, with high reproductive potential. These data on age and fertility can only be obtained through lethal research.

Conservation has been defined as the wise use of natural resources. Conservation of whales in the Antarctic therefore can be achieved through relevant population and ecological research, with subsequent harvest that is conservative in scope, so that no whale stocks shall be diminished by that use. The Australian research appears to have a goal of thwarting the intent of the ICRW, because its advocates have stated that whales should not be killed for any reason. This culture conflict diminishes respect for the historic role of relevant science in the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

All nations' party to the ICRW should review their national policies on whaling and whale conservation, and resolve to either adhere to the intent of the convention or leave it.

## Sea Shepherds and Media All Miss the Boat

**On January 6, 2010, the Sea Shepherd trimaran attack vessel the *Ady Gil* collided with the Japanese vessel the *Shonan Maru 2*, during an exercise in which the *Ady Gil* had attempted to foul the Japanese vessel's propellers with ropes and buoys. The *Ady Gil* was manned by six New Zealand crewmembers, and had been engaged in other harassment of both the *Yushin Maru No. 3* and the *Shonan Maru 2*, in days previous. The *Ady Gil* was a very fast and maneuverable vessel, and had been specifically tasked by the Sea Shepherds with harassing the Japanese vessels whenever possible. On January 6, it collided with the *Shonan Maru 2* in such a way that its bow was ripped off, and by January 8th it sank, spreading an oil slick on the Antarctic waters near a penguin colony**

It appears that the Sea Shepherd exercise has deprived that organization of its best harassment vehicle, but the real news appears to be that when it attacked the *Shonan Maru 2*, with the ropes and buoys, with laser beams aimed at the crew, and with projectiles lobbed by some mechanical device, it was doing no harm to the Japanese research effort in the Southern Ocean. The *Shonan Maru 2* has recently been described as a "security" vessel, and it may well be that while it is part of the Japanese research whaling fleet, it is actually down there to protect the fleet from such criminal activism. Therefore, it may actually have been "bait" for the Sea Shepherd activist team, and they took it, hook, line and finally, sank.

Various media were contacted by the Sea Shepherds, and also “took the bait” of believing and repeating the activist version that the small vessel was deliberately and unfairly rammed by the larger Japanese ship, which they all described as a whaling vessel. CNN, Fox News and MSNBC all participated briefly in such reporting.

The bottom line is that the Ady Gil is no more, its crew are all ok, although one reportedly suffered broken ribs in the collision. In addition to the loss of this harassment vessel, Sea Shepherd leader

Paul Watson, who was not on the scene at the time, complained that the New Zealand Foreign Affairs Minister Murray McCully has acted improperly in stating that the Ady Gil crew were misbehaving; “If people are determined to break the law and determined to kill other people, it is not the responsibility of the New Zealand government or any other government to send ships down there.

*Dr. Janice Henke, Anthropologist*

## Tiger Tales The Arguments For and Against Farming Tigers

**At the present time, China does not allow the import of tiger parts for trade within its borders, due to its own and global concerns regarding the conservation status of all wild stocks of this species. It is known that poaching of wild tigers in India and China, and continued smuggling of their parts into China, has resulted in extremely serious diminishment of their wild populations. Some media reports have made the smuggling issue notorious, in cases where illicit traders were attempting to smuggle parts into the country but were caught and prosecuted. The actions of customs inspections and a Chinese intelligence agency thwarted the attempts.**

At the upcoming CITES conference in March, parties shall once again debate the issue of whether or not the species may be saved from extinction through a cooperative effort to raise and protect these animals on farms in India, Africa and China. One such plan would be to eventually sell products from these animals in China for the practice of indigenous medicine, as well as to “re-wild” some of the animals back into certain habitats where they once thrived. At this time, it is not known if Chinese authorities are seriously considering the possibility that tiger farming may be an appropriate answer to the problem of depletion of this species. There are advocates of the concept who believe that legal trade of tigers from farmed stock could successfully compete with smuggling, if the supply of farmed animals was sufficient to meet cultural demand. The concept has been used with other species, which have been successfully farmed and entered into legal commercial trade with positive conservation effects on wild stocks.

IWMC wishes to advance the concept of saving this species from extinction by causing it to be a profitable farmed commercial venture; this new model is worth trying, because law enforcement efforts against poaching of tigers as wild game have not been adequate. Critics have pointed out that it is very expensive to raise farmed tigers, so the end product might not be cheap enough to compete with poached animals. Large scale farming, however, could be the only answer in a world where poachers seem intent on killing every wild tiger that exists. The cooperative efforts of those who advocate raising tigers for both “re-wilding” and for commercial trade may be expected to result in an eventual conservation impact that shall have ongoing benefits for people, for tigers, and for the natural environments in which they may once again, thrive.



## The Bluefin Tuna Problem

### **Appropriate Conservation and Management vs. Inappropriate Power Plays at CITES**

The CITES Secretariat has received a proposal to list *Thunnus thynnus* in Appendix I, at Qatar, during COP 15. The evaluation of stocks of Bluefin tuna and management of them is carried out within jurisdiction of ICCAT, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas. All members of ICCAT are also parties to CITES. ICCAT specializes in overseeing tuna research and recommends appropriately conservative quotas and seasons. Its scientific advisors are well aware of the degree to which Bluefin tuna are known to have declined in numbers. It is the responsibility of ICCAT members to take matters into their own hands, and to mandate biologically appropriate measures for Bluefin conservation. ICCAT members are aware that they must cooperate in strictly enforcing fisheries regulations for the sustainable use of this species.

By the time COP 15 convenes, the ICCAT shall have adopted new measures and regulations, and the FAO shall include an agreement by Port states to combat illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing.

The CITES proposal for listing Bluefin on Appendix I is an inappropriate measure, outside of the competency of that body, and inappropriate also because at CITES COP 14, the convention refused “to give greater attention to international trade in aquatic species”. CITES does not have the necessary budget resources with which to “take over” the direction of research, reporting and restrictions on trade that would be necessary to accomplish Bluefin conservation, and the effort would be redundant, in light of the ICCAT and FAO measures.

It appears that this attempt to add a CITES Appendix I listing for Bluefin tuna may be one more in a series of “power plays” by certain NGOs, of which the most active player in this instance is the WWF. The Monaco proposal was apparently written by the WWF and it is glaringly inappropriate in light of the existing FAO and ICCAT structures and restrictions. Unfortunately, there is a growing trend in CITES in which NGOs attempt to influence decisions by parties, through a tactic of using their own constituents. CITES party citizens read the NGO websites, and click a provided link to send emails to their national leaders, demanding bans on trade in certain iconic species. This tactic for NGO influence has been increasingly noticeable at CITES and has not been a constructive development in international efforts at meaningful cooperation in conservation issues.

IWMC strongly advises that CITES parties resist these pressures and follow their traditional path of appropriate communication with those other fora, such as ICCAT and FAO, and refrain from jumping into agreements to simply ban trade in any species managed by those bodies. This should prevent budget problems and non-science based management decisions made for irrelevant political reasons.



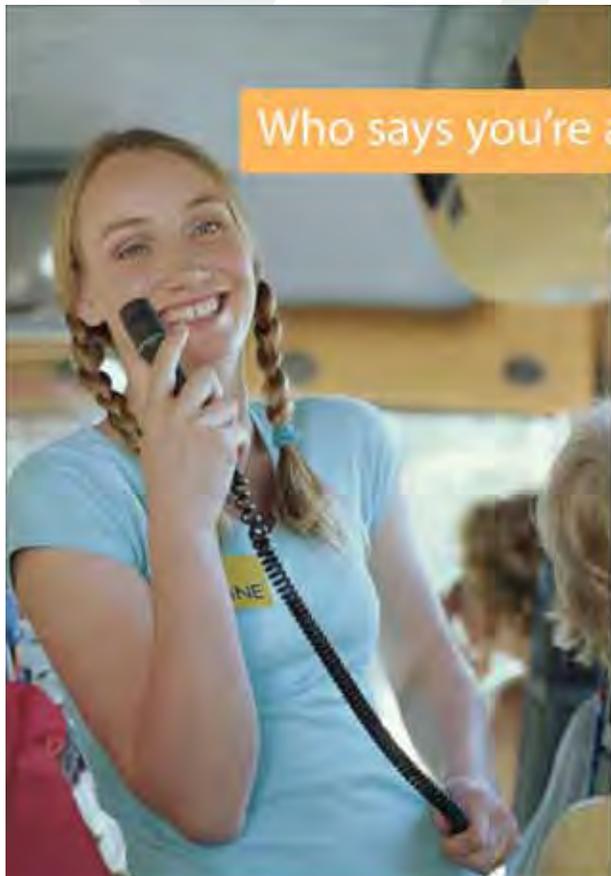
## Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

**Do you like Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde? Here is the Bluefin tuna version of the story. Starring: WWF**

On one hand, WWF has partnered with tuna industry interests to form the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation. We have heard of the laudable objectives of this foundation, the primary goal of which is to ensure that targeted tuna stocks will be sustained at or above levels of abundance capable of supporting maximum sustainable yield in a healthy ecosystem. This is Dr Jekyll, now here comes Mr. Hyde... WWF is the lobbying group behind the U.S. decision to join the proposal to list the Bluefin Tuna in CITES Appendix I. WWF is also known to have

drafted the original proposal that is now alleged to have originated from Monaco. WWF is busy lobbying government officials in many countries to support the proposal.

If the Bluefin listing is agreed to at the CITES meeting in March, it will be secured not on scientific merits but from the pressure that WWF and other groups have exerted on the political system. It is incumbent on all parties to ensure that scientific rigor is applied to any decision that shall affect the security of species in their ecosystems, and to consider how human harvest and trade in species shall impact those species, both immediately and in the foreseeable future.



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## Crimes for the Camera - Science for the Whales

**The Antarctic Ocean is currently the scene of three different human ventures; Australia and New Zealand are conducting a six-week cruise for the purpose of proving that these nations are concerned about the conservation of whales. Scientists aboard the research vessel are identifying and counting whales, collecting their feces to examine what the animals may have been eating, and darting them with tissue collectors in order to do genetic studies. The entire venture alleges to demonstrate that one need not kill whales in order to study them. This is legal scientific research, but not vital to whale conservation.**

This is fine, although the research is not expected to result in any news about whales which has not already been demonstrated by twenty plus years of in-depth study conducted by Japan's Institute of Cetacean Research. This venture is not absolutely useless, but is not expected to benefit whales or their environment in any measurable way. What it shall accomplish is an expenditure by those governments that shall support their claim of concern for whales, which they believe should not be killed for any reason, either for scientific study or for human consumption. All of this activity is legal.

The Japanese research fleet is conducting its 23<sup>rd</sup> annual survey of whales in the southern ocean, through both lethal and non-lethal research that shall as usual, be reported in full to the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission. Whale health, diet, pollution load, genetic relationships, the age profile of their populations, and their fertility and state of nutrition, shall all be recorded and added to the data archive that has shown the world how abundant and healthy these animals are, as well as the nature and condition of their ecosystem. Whale meat and blubber shall be frozen and sold in domestic markets in Japan, as these are traditional foods there, and the

Convention requires that byproducts of research shall be used rather than wasted. All of this activity is legal and it has contributed more to the world's knowledge about whale conservation than any previous body of research.

The third venture is neither scientific nor legal. The two remaining vessels of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, headed by Paul Watson, are manned by international crews of people who object to Japan's lethal research, and who are doing their worst to harass the research crews and interfere with their work. Their actions have included ramming the research vessels, attempting to foul their propellers with ropes and chains, firing stink bombs and other projectiles onto the ships and aiming high intensity laser beams at the Japanese crew persons. One small and highly maneuverable, very fast protest vessel came in too close to a Japanese ship and was struck and broken apart. It soon sank. While no lives were lost, it was a significant price to pay for committing crimes of aggression against a legal research expedition. The Japanese crews have responded defensively, with water canons and loud noise bursts, but have not aggressively pursued their attackers.

The Sea Shepherds have a contract with the US television network Animal Planet. The film company that agreed to record all the attacks on Japanese vessels and their subsequent reactions, has continually filmed the Sea Shepherd criminal actions of the past few weeks. Similarly, Japanese crew have also filmed all the attacks against their ships and personnel, so the crimes on the high seas are therefore, well documented. Sea Shepherds are committing crimes for the camera despite the risk to human lives, in the expectation that these episodes shall attract millions of televi-



sion viewers and shall present the perspective of the Sea Shepherds that the Japanese research is illegal and unnecessary, even “a cover-up for commercial whaling”. Of course, these claims are false, and they do not come close to justifying the periodic dangerous aggression against the Japanese research fleet.

It appears that the Sea Shepherd aggression is more intensely criminal and audacious since the addition of the television film crew to the mix. Crimes were being committed prior to this, but this year and last have been the worst on record. Even those nations whose leaders proclaim disdain for Japan's research program have consistently stated that criminal aggression on the high seas is unjustified and should be stopped. It appears that nothing short of physical disaster or the physical apprehension of these “eco-pirates” can be expected to bring this phase of stupidity to an end. It is now incumbent on those nations whose flags are flying on the attack vessels, and on those nations that have been giving port privileges to the crews, to finally act responsibly and drop their support of this self-serving, vicious and disingenuous organization.

## Noteworthy

20-22 May 2010  
**INFOFISH TUNA 2010 BANGKOK**  
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