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Sustainable eNews
IWMC World Conservation Trust

Promoting Sustainable Use

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Welcome to the 175th Party to CITES

On 21 January 2009, Bosnia and Herzegovina deposited its instrument of accession to CITES, and will so become the 175th Party to CITES on 21 April 2009

IWC "Compromise" Package is found to be Deficient In Terms of the Principles of the ICRW

Editorial by Dr Janice Henke

Despite the best intentions and laudable efforts of Dr. Bill Hogarth and the advice of his cooperating UN negotiation experts, the latest proposed IWC compromise is looking increasingly problematic. While the intentions to solve the impasse are admirable, the strategy was flawed because of the implicit suggestion that scientific research whaling is harmful, or irrelevant to whale ecology.

Mr. Shigeru Ishiba, Minister of Japan's Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries government department, has been quoted as saying "We cannot accept a proposal that discontinues our research hunting". The proposal had offered Japan the opportunity to harvest enough animals for the four traditional whaling villages, if the government would agree to cut the Southern Ocean research quota by 20% per year for five years.

Why should they accept such a deal when Japanese scientific research teams have been collecting and analyzing relevant biological and migration data since 1987, in full compliance with Article VIII of the Convention? The Scientific Committee of the IWC has praised this work, and has noted that it does contribute to the science-based, conservation knowledge of minke whales.

This work and other research efforts in the Southern Ocean and in the north Pacific around Japan have indicated the seriousness of Japan's determination to learn as much as possible about cetacean abundance, trends in nutrition, fertility, natural mortality, and pollution load. In addition, data pertaining to probable inter-species food competition have also been collected and analyzed, giving insights into reasons for the slow recovery of blue whales in the Antarctic, while the abundant minkes themselves have shown a long term diminished level of blubber-derived energy stores.

The entire point of this massive, long term research effort has been to determine what levels of commercial whaling in these areas would be sustainable, with the primary focus on minke whales. No scientists from other IWC member nations accepted

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Japan's invitations to join the research teams in their efforts, which have been both lethal and non-lethal field work studies. The Scientific Committee of the IWC has concluded that up to 2000 minke whales could be harvested from the Antarctic each year without detriment to those stocks. The research program sets a limit of 850 minke per year for the lethal research (plus or minus 10 per cent), far below the safe harvest level, so despite the claims and cries of anti-whaling NGOs, no harm to whale stocks has occurred.

Anti-whaling IWC members such as Australia have commonly used derogatory language in describing and discussing Japan's Antarctic research programs. NGOs including IFAW, HSUS, Greenpeace, WWF, and the Sea Shepherds have all made false claims about the legality, scientific relevance, and conservation impact of the programs.

Because there is a relatively new (30 year-old) cultural ideology about the use versus non-use of whales as resources, governments have found themselves trying to work through a traditional structure of science based management in conjunction with traditional diplomacy, in a pattern that extremist NGOs have now caused to be unworkable. Governments are now constantly criticized and besieged with email complaints that appear to be from their own constituents. The age of the Internet has now changed everything, and risk adverse politicians are now violating the very Convention in which members devised fail-safe procedures, such as the Revised Management Procedure (RMP), to ensure that hunted whales are safe from depletion.

We recognize and regret the sad futility of IWC attempts at compromise, and applaud all those efforts to limit the effectiveness of the NGO-inspired anti-science campaigns. Governments dare not act without NGO approval in this matter, for fear of NGO-fueled media coverage that would put their leaders in a very unattractive light. This is what the world has come to, as science has been replaced by cultural preferences in the matter of food choices for a tiny minority of the world's population.

Perhaps Japan shall do as Iceland, Norway, and a few other nations in making their own, regionally based, decisions on sustainable harvest of cetacean resources in the future. This long episode of conflict and power demonstrations has seemingly come to a conclusion that has not benefited man, the marine environment, or the whales and fish upon which many of us depend. And the irony of it all is, that the "whale saviors" have only themselves to blame. If they had not been a factor influencing government policy, then governments might have reached agreement long ago on sustainable harvest levels for abundant recovered species, which is the spirit, the goals and the script of the Whaling Convention. ■

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UN and Others seek to solve World Hunger Crisis

The United Nations Environment Program has recently reported on a world hunger conference held in Nairobi. The agency investigated and discussed problems of inadequate food in certain areas of the world. Agency spokespersons outlined current problems as at a "crisis" level that could be followed by outright famine. The UNEP press release claims that major changes must be made in the ways in which food is produced, handled, transported and distributed. Waste is a huge problem, as UNEP recognizes that as much as half of all food produced never reaches the human mouths for which it is intended.

Specific problems identified include a UNEP bias against the current practice of feeding as much as 30% of the world's grain crops to livestock - a practice that is projected to increase to 50% by the year 2050. This is a cultural issue of grave importance, as many societies feel that livestock is essential to their food security.

The agency report highlights recycling of food wastes into biofuels, a laudable end product for otherwise discarded materials. Some food by-products could also be used as livestock feeds, thus increasing efficiency of harvest efforts.

Other solutions being addressed involve changes in the ways in which aquaculture is conducted - at the present time some facilities are being located offshore, in deeper waters with strong currents, in hopes of avoiding pollution problems seen in shallow water facilities. In addition, the report notes that currently a huge tonnage of wild-caught fish is discarded at sea as unwanted, and unmarketable. This currently wasted resource could be put to good use if converted to fish meal, intended for both land-based livestock and for fish farms.

IWMC President Eugene Lapointe applauds the UNEP efforts to both investigate and report upon the world food crisis, noting that human beings need to plan intelligently to cope with climate changes that cause increasing water shortages on land, and increasing difficulties with agriculture. "All renewable resources must be evaluated for more efficient technologies in production, marketing and transportation, in order to ensure ongoing sustainability for the years to come". Lapointe added that the world's marine resources are of great concern to all knowledgeable persons, and that certain predators of fish, including man, seal species and whale species, all must be regulated or managed so that their own take shall be sustainable. "When people attempt to obstruct the sustainable human use of seals and certain whales, they are adding stress to the marine ecosystems, because unhunted marine mammal predators eat millions of tons of fish per year, and this imbalance must be corrected. The intelligent way to do this is to encourage, rather than to protest, a sustainable harvest and multi-use of these abundant animals for the good of man and the entire global environment, as we six billion humans eat our way through the 21st century."■

A vibrant appeal to respect of cultural identity...

Letter to the editor of the "Matangi,"

Tonga.

Letters & Comments: Whales
28 Feb 2009 - 16:18 GMT+1300

Tonga's whaling rights

Editor,

On this whaling topic. I am surprised that the Department of Commerce and the Government of Tonga have not taken the initiative to fight for Tonga's to be able to get at least two whales a year for local consumption.

The Ministry of Commerce should provide data's and numbers that would support this proposal.

An Indian Tribe in Alaska has the right to butcher one whale a year to supplement the tribe's protein need.

You go Taiji . . . Hurry up Tonga.
Mafi 'o Amerika Samoa

Watson on the Run!

The current season's eco-terrorism madness in the Antarctic may be over. The Sea Shepherds have once again announced they have left the arena of the Southern Ocean, after ramming and damaging Japanese research vessels, interfering with the recovery attempt of a man lost at sea, attempting to foul Japanese propellers, throwing acid in breakable glass bottles, throwing other noxious substances onto the decks of whaling research vessels, and hurling some kind of projectile, perhaps signal flares, at research ships. All these actions have been filmed in order to document the criminal acts committed by this Dutch-flagged ship on the high seas.

Now, Watson claims to have received word that a Japanese "security vessel" has been dispatched from Fiji in order to apprehend the Steve Irwin, board it and take possession of the ship and of Sea Shepherd video of this season's escapades. IWMC wishes the best for the success of any attempt to take these thugs into custody and to put an end to the annual misadventures of the Sea Shepherd crew. Film of the Sea Shepherd attacks on research vessels has also been produced for another lucrative Animal Planet production, to be shown next fall. Perhaps this bad idea shall be prevented from realization, and the film used instead in prosecution of these vandals ! ■

This Eco-Soap Doesn't Wash

This is the third season during which the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society has done its best to hinder legal scientific research on whales in the Antarctic. Paul Watson is leader of this organization, and the 2007/08 season was the first time he lucked out in enticing major media to film his vandalism and eco-terrorism on the high seas. Last season's fiasco was filmed by a contractor to Animal Planet. The series was shown in the US on Friday and Sunday nights in late fall and through December of 2008. For the 2008/09 whale research season, again Animal Planet had a film crew on board the Sea Shepherd vessel. On December 26, the Sea Shepherd vessel rammed the Japanese sightings vessel the Kaiko Maru, while the activist crew threw glass bottles of acid and some other substance onto its decks. After circling the Kaiko Maru, ramming and slightly damaging it, the Sea Shepherds ran off to the east and disappeared from radar. The action did not stop any research operations. The ship attacked does not harpoon whales. It is assigned to identify them by species and to count them, on a pre-determined tract over a pre-determined period of time. Watson's crew claim they are saving whales through their actions against this sightings vessel. This is incorrect.

"Whale Wars" is a series of "eco-soaps" in which an inexperienced, inept crew of 20-somethings are shown on board the "Steve Irwin", as Watson has renamed his old ship, looking for Japanese vessels to ram, disable and vandalize in the vastness of the Antarctic. Watson himself appears occasionally, usually at his laptop, sometimes on the bridge, and does not exhibit much obvious leadership. The Antarctic adventures appear to have attracted more than his usual quotient of media attention.

Half of the SS crew appears to be young women. They occasionally voice their value system by declaring that whales are beautiful and should never be hunted. The dominant theme is that the crew all signed on "to give their lives if necessary" in this contrived attempt to "save whales". Over the past three seasons, some have come close - a small boat overturned with crew on board, crew members have risked their lives by driving their zodiacs up to Japanese research vessels and attempting to foul the propellers with chains and nets, and crew have repeatedly thrown glass bottles of butyric acid and other noxious substances onto the decks of research vessels. A few broken bones and other injuries have occurred, and medical facilities and expertise appear to be minimal.

It is reasonable to suspect that Watson is using females to keep attention on this soap opera, and he has sent them alone in a small boat to confront the Japanese ships - a tactic he explained by telling them that the Japanese would not know how to behave if an all female crew confronted them. When one young woman asked him what the girls could be charged with if they were taken into custody, he answered "interfering with business", referring to his oft-repeated claim that the whaling is commercial. The research program of the Japanese Institute for Cetacean Research is legal under terms of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling, which sets the

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basis for whale conservation actions undertaken by the International Whaling Commission. (See iwcoffice.org, Article VIII of the Convention).

The IWC has in 2006 and 2007 expressed unanimous concern about vandalism and eco-terrorism at sea, which has been conducted by both Sea Shepherds and by Greenpeace. Greenpeace has been famous for interfering with lethal takings by ramming small boats between whalers and whales, and for interfering with ship refueling operations. This season, however, the organization opted not to send a vessel, perhaps because Greenpeace HQ could not trust its crews not to reveal to Sea Shepherd the coordinates of the Japanese vessels. The Sea Shepherds were gaining all the publicity in Australia and were therefore monopolizing the fundraising. Watson has long understood that extremism is a top money-maker.

At the 2007 IWC meeting in Anchorage, a number of member nations referred to the non-governmental organization vandalism as "state sponsored terrorism". The United States, Australia and the Netherlands are the states mentioned, because the US and Australia both continue to allow the Sea Shepherds charity, tax-exempt status, fund raising privileges or port privileges. The Netherlands allows the Sea Shepherd to fly the national flag. [The acts committed by the SS crew have consistently fit the definition of piracy by the International Maritime Organization but mainly of the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Under Paragraph c) of Article 101 of UNCLOS, the definition of "piracy" could fit countries authorizing the bearing of their flag by pirates, and those providing assistance (refueling) to those directly involved in acts of piracy.]

Each "Whale Wars" series usually shows an initial scene in which Watson's ship approaches a Japanese vessel. He is shown bellowing over a megaphone to the other ship, demanding that it "stop the illegal killing of whales in the Antarctic Sanctuary". The present research take is not commercial whaling, regardless of the fact that the by-products are sold in Japan for human consumption. Such use is also a provision of Article VIII of the Convention.

No whales are being taken illegally in the Antarctic by the Japanese research vessels, and no whale species are being threatened or endangered by the current research action. Those IWC member nations, such as Australia, New Zealand, the US, most of Europe and South America, all object to the research because it is transparent and because it is expected to demonstrate that certain levels of harvest on specific populations can be conducted at any time in the future. These nations are besieged by a growing minority of their electorates, who have been misinformed about the entire situation by non-governmental organizations' lurid websites. These organizations have accomplished media attention, significant fund raising, and growing political influence due to their involvement in the "save the whales" movement. The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society is not one of the largest or richest of these groups, but in winning the Animal Planet Network as a pulpit, has outmaneuvered the more well known groups such as Greenpeace and Humane Society of the United States.

Whale Wars as an eco-soap opera is an egregiously incorrect perspective that should be seen as a political power play on the part of NGOs to direct national environmental policies on the basis of cultural preference rather than on the basis of scientific investigation, a traditional and proven model for safety.

This year's research season has so far seen a human tragedy; 30 year old crewman Mr. Hajime Shirasaki, an oiler on the Kyoshin Maru No. 2, a dedicated sightings vessel, was apparently lost overboard in the Antarctic on January 5. Calls were immediately put out
to the New Zealand Rescue Coordination Center, requesting aid from any vessels in the area. The Sea Shepherd crew learned the Japanese ship coordinates through this means, and hurried to the area, where instead of assisting the search (the Steve Irwin did not deploy its helicopter) they maneuvered dangerously close to Japanese search vessels, hindering the search. Although Watson claimed to be offering assistance, his actions belied this, and the "assistance" was refused. Television cameras from Animal Planet will undoubtedly portray the Sea Shepherd spin on this incident.

IWMC deplores the actions of Sea Shepherd terrorists and calls on all responsible IWC member nations to desist from giving this criminal group any assistance such as flag bearing, access to ports, continued charity status, and continued fund raising privileges. The flag of the Netherlands should not be allowed to fly over the decks of this eco-terrorist vessel. Any privileges granted to this group should be considered state sponsored support for terrorism. ■

Seal Time 2009
Seals and the Marine Environment

The waters of the North Atlantic are teeming with marine mammals and their prey, the fish and krill that have always fed them. This is not, however, the ocean of our ancestors, our grandfathers, or even that of our fathers, because it is now an imbalanced ecosystem in which many beings are unnaturally hungry. The problem occurs when too many seals, insufficiently managed due to culturally imposed market restrictions, are born and live to mature in an environment that can not adequately sustain them.

The governments bordering this ocean recognize that gray and harp seals must be managed through annual hunts of the young of the year, because without that action, their populations continue to grow as the animals themselves become more and more desperate to find food. The human fishermen, similarly, are finding it more difficult to find their quotas of capelin, herring, mackerel and other species, as they remember the days when these species and Atlantic cod were all plentiful - those were the times when a market for seal pelts and fat was reliable and the meat was consumed at home, while the sale of pelts and fat sustained fishermen in the time of spring ice, before nets could be set.

Then the days of protest against the annual seal hunt began, in the late 1970s and in 1983 European legislative bodies, impressed by citizen petitions against the hunt, temporarily banned the import of seal products. Although the market resumed after a number of years, the damage had been done; too many seals had lived to reproduce, and today, the entire Atlantic ecosystem is still adversely affected by harp and gray seals that have literally “eaten themselves out of their environment”. Something must be done to bring this ecosystem back to a healthy condition.

Humans are regulated through government restrictions on their fish harvest, but seals pay no attention to these human affairs. They eat all they can find, consuming hundreds of millions of fish, including some taken by breaking into aquaculture pens. And still, they are hungry and in some areas, desperately swimming upstream where they have never been before, looking for fish that are not there.

Contrary to the claims and campaigns of anti-sealing protesters, seals are extremely abundant, sealers are professionally trained in humane and efficient killing methods, supervision of sealers is widespread, and the annual harvest is absolutely necessary for coastal communities and for the health of the entire marine ecosystem. This annual protest, and the impact it has on EU legislators, is bad for the environment, bad for seals, and extremely harsh on coastal peoples who have always lived in harmony with the sea and its resources.

IWMC and many governments and their coastal citizens, all hope for a positive outcome for Seal Time 2009. EU legislators need to realize that they have been misinformed about the seal harvest, and especially about humane issues. The seal hunts in north Atlantic waters are environmentally necessary and are humanely conducted. The products, pelts and fat, are truly “green” as their production contributes to both human and ecosystem welfare. In this time of economic upheaval, trade must not be diminished. In this instance, trade in seal products is a quantifiable benefit to seals, fish, whales, sea birds, and not least of all, to human beings, who have a tradition of seal use that began in prehistory. Human use of seals must continue in order that sustainability of all the fruits of the sea shall be realized for generations to come. ■