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SEAFARERS CLEARED OF WHALE MEAT CLAIMS

Seafarers from the Nisshin Maru, the vessel used in Japan's research whaling program in the Antarctic, have been cleared by their employer Kyodo Senpaku Kaisha, Ltd and the Institute of Cetacean Research (ICR) of allegations they were stealing whale meat.

Kyodo Senpaku Kaisha and the ICR conducted an investigation into allegations that sailors had stolen whale meat from the vessel on its return from the Antarctic in April.

The allegations were made by activists from the anti-whaling organization, Greenpeace Japan, who themselves stole whale meat from the Aomori Branch of Seino Transportation Ltd. The Greenpeace activists claimed that the meat they stole was "proof" of large-scale whale meat thefts.

"Kyodo Senpaku and the ICR have conducted a thorough investigation of the claims by Greenpeace and found that all of their allegations are false. The seafarers involved have been cleared of all claims made against them," the President of Kyodo Senpaku Kaisha, Ltd, Kazuo Yamamura, said today.

Mr Yamamura said his company reached the same conclusion as the Tokyo District Public Prosecutor's Office, which found that the whale meat was not stolen, that it was in fact a gift to crew members engaged in the processing line, that Kyodo Senpaku had in fact purchased a certain amount of whale products from the Institute of Cetacean Research for the purpose of later distribution to its crew members as a gift, and that there was no truth to allegations of a widespread whale meat embezzlement ring.

On June 20, the Tokyo District Public Prosecutor's Office dropped the case against the 12 crew members.

"The false allegations from Greenpeace show just how malicious these activists have become because our sailors have been living under a cloud of suspicion for more than two months while separate investigations by police and their employers have been carried out. We thank them for their loyalty and their patience and we are glad they can now rest assured that the truth is known and they are innocent," Mr Yamamura said.

Mr Yamamura stressed that it was important that Greenpeace Japan and its two activists who have been charged with theft from Seino Transportation Ltd face the full force of Japanese law.

"There was not a shred of evidence to support any of the Greenpeace claims. An explanation could be that zealotry clouded their judgment. Unfortunately, their maliciousness knows no bounds and Greenpeace continues to deny it is wrong. In the absence of any remorse, we hope prosecutors pursue the strongest case against the activists and the organization," Mr Yamamura said.

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Kyodo Senpaku/ICR Report submitted to Fisheries Agency (in Japanese) :

<http://www.icrwhale.org/pdf/080718ReleaseJp.pdf>