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JAPAN'S SENIOR WHALE SCIENTIST RESPONDS TO NEW YORK TIMES ADVERTISEMENT

The following is a response from Japan's senior whale scientist, Dr. Seiji Ohsumi, Director General of the Institute of Cetacean Research to an advertisement in the New York Times on May 20, 2002.

Sir:

The open letter to the Government of Japan on scientific whaling published on May 20, 2002 signed by 21 scientists is an affront to science. Only one of these 21 scientists could even remotely be considered an expert on the subject of whales. Their letter misrepresents both science and facts. Would a group of medical eye specialists be considered competent to criticize the work of specialists dealing with intestinal disorders?

Further, despite their claim to the contrary, Japan has fully complied with its obligations in respect of the moratorium by ending its commercial whaling even though the moratorium was implemented in the absence of scientific advice that it was needed for conservation purposes.

It is also clear from the letter that these 21 individuals do not understand the provisions of this Convention, which specifically provides for members of the IWC to issue permits for killing of whales for research purposes and requires that the byproducts, that is the meat, be utilized to the extent possible. Their reference to the commercial nature of the research catch is therefore misleading at best. At worst, it is a sinister attempt by one of the scientists who knows better to dishonestly politicize the issue and gather the signatures of those who would not be familiar with the terms of the Convention. Simply put, selling the meat is a legal requirement under the terms of the Convention to avoid waste of valuable resources.

Most importantly however, their claims that most of the data being gathered are obtainable by non-lethal research, that sei whales are endangered and that killing additional sei whales will not add to existing knowledge about their diet are scientifically unjustifiable. They ignore the clearly stated objectives of the research, which is to gather data as input to ecosystem models designed to improve the management of all resources in the western north Pacific. These models require quantitative data on what whales eat in relation to available prey, where they are feeding and how much they are eating. Non-lethal means for studying diets of whales simply do not provide the required data.

Further, sei whales are the second most abundant species of whale in the western north Pacific with an estimated population of over 28,000 animals. Clearly not endangered. Existing data on sei whale diets comes from examination of stomach contents of whales taken in previous commercial whaling operations. This data is not quantitative and not useful as input for ecosystem models.

The statements of the 21 individuals on these matters are ill informed and misleading. They also contradict unequivocal statements made by the IWC's Scientific Committee that Japan's research programs are providing valuable data for management of whale stocks. Japan has presented all of its data to the IWC Scientific Committee for review. Claims to the contrary are simply false. Further, Dr. Ray Gambell, a whale scientist who served as the Secretary of the IWC for 24 years has publicly stated that Japan is not doing anything illegal under the terms of the Convention.

During the recently completed meeting of International Whaling Commission's Scientific Committee, Japan expressed its concern that there has been an increasing dissociation of the Committee's work from science with the result that much of the discussion on important matters has become little more than inappropriate politically motivated discourse. The letter is another good example of this problem. By publishing their letter, the 21 scientists have opened themselves to serious charges that they are mis-using their reputations to evade their responsibilities to the world community to honestly represent science. I respectfully urge them to individually to seriously review this matter.

Dr. Seiji Ohsumi
DIRECTOR GENERAL