



FISHERIES AGENCY
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PRESS RELEASE

Japan tells world fisheries organization that consumption of fish by marine mammals threatens to undermine conservation efforts.

(Rome – February 27, 2003)

Japan's delegation to the 25th Session of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Committee on Fisheries today urged the Committee to continue its efforts to develop and implement ecosystem models as a way to improve fisheries management.

Joji Morishita, Deputy Director of the Far Seas Fisheries Division of Japan's Fisheries Agency presented preliminary findings from Japan's whale research program in the North Pacific. He told reporter afterwards that "failure to account for the huge volume of marine resources consumed by whales in the ecosystem models being developed for fisheries management threatens to undermine fisheries conservation efforts" and that "the matter of fish consumption by whales and ecosystem modeling is the primary focus of Japan's whale research program in the North Pacific."

Mr. Morishita said "our efforts to manage fisheries on a sustainable basis as a contribution to world food security should not be compromised by those who would continue to totally protect abundant and increasing populations of whales for purely political reasons." "Doing so means a distortion of priorities where we would be managing fisheries to feed whales rather than humans" he added.

Mr. Morishita explained that investigations have shown that approximately three to five hundred million tons of marine food resources are consumed annually by cetaceans, some 3 to 6 times more than are fished for human consumption. In the waters around Japan catches in certain fisheries are declining while at the same time sampling has revealed that whales are eating at least 10 of the target species of these fisheries including Japanese anchovy, Pacific saury, and walleye Pollock. Mr. Morishita said "The common perception is that whales just eat plankton or fish of no commercial value but this is not the case – as has been shown for the North Atlantic, this is direct competition with fisheries to feed humans."

The matter of competition between marine mammals and fisheries is now of serious concern for nations dependant of fisheries as well as for international and regional fisheries management organizations including the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization.

At its meeting two years ago, the FAO Committee on Fisheries agreed to conduct studies on the interaction between marine mammals and fisheries. The International Whaling Commission has also made the study of this a matter of priority and the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg adopted a Plan that included implementation of ecosystem approaches to fisheries management.

Mr. Morishita said, “The IWC’s Scientific Committee has noted that Japan’s whale research programs are providing valuable information for managing whale stocks but the issue is broader than that. We are providing valuable information on the feeding habits of whales that will be used as input to ecosystem models for better managing all of our fisheries resources. This is now a world-wide agreed objective.”

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See also: www.icrwhale.org and the following three pamphlets:

- Photographs from Japan’s Whale Research in the Western North Pacific (JARPN II), The Institute of Cetacean Research, Tokyo.
- Japan’s Whale Research Program under Special Permit in the Antarctic (JARPA), The Institute of Cetacean Research, Tokyo.
- Cetacean and Multi-species Fisheries Management. Fisheries Agency, Government of Japan and The Institute of Cetacean Research, Tokyo.