

IWC CALLS FOR MORE RESEARCH TO CONFIRM MINKE NUMBERS

LONDON

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The Chairman of the International Whaling Commission's Scientific Committee today called for more research to be conducted urgently to confirm the abundance of minke whales in the Southern Ocean.

In reporting to the plenary session in London, Dr J.E. Zeh, stated that the Scientific Committee was unable to give an accurate estimate of minke whales in the Antarctic. In 1990, the Scientific Committee agreed on an estimate of 760,000.

The latest IDCR/SOWER programme to estimate the abundance of Southern Hemisphere minke numbers in the Antarctic is yet to be completed.

Preliminary estimates from the incomplete survey cannot be used to imply any change in the abundance. The Scientific Committee noted a number of confounding factors that make comparison of this survey with previous surveys inappropriate. These include changes in the coverage of the management area, observer efficiency, the location of the ice edge, the proportion of animals likely to be south of the ice edge and, most importantly, a change in the timing of the survey. When these factors are accounted for, the estimates will be much higher.

Dr Zeh said: "The Committee agreed that no firm conclusions about a change in true abundance can be drawn now ... The Committee therefore strongly recommends that very high priority be assigned to conducting such work as part of the current review of Southern Hemisphere minke abundance estimates."

Japan's alternate Commissioner to the IWC, Masayuki Komatsu, said: "Attempts by the Commissioners from New Zealand and the United States to portray the Scientific Committee's report as indicating a decline in the abundance are a misinterpretation of the science."

"Japan is the only country contributing significant resources to this research of the Scientific Committee and we look forward to the completion of this work over the next several years."

"Japan contributes the vessels and crew, as well as some of the scientists for this work, and we believe the research may also show a higher figure than that previous agreed by the Scientific Committee," Mr Komatsu said. "The uncertainty concerning the current minke whale abundance estimates has confirmed the need for Japan's research in the Antarctic."