



J-stock minke whales threatened: the reality of bycatch

by Junko Sakuma

The forth type of 'whaling'

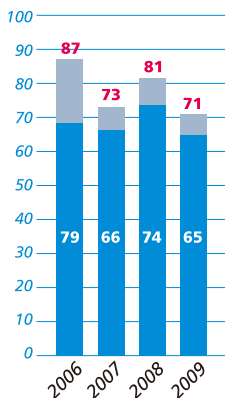
%

Estimated average number of by-caught J-stock

By-catch believed to be non-J stock
 The estimated number of by-catch J-stock

*Total reported number indicated in red

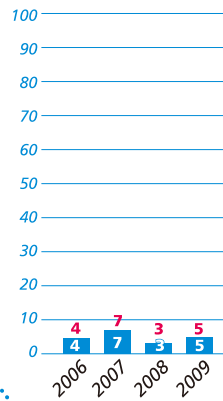
Sea of Japan (East Sea)



91%



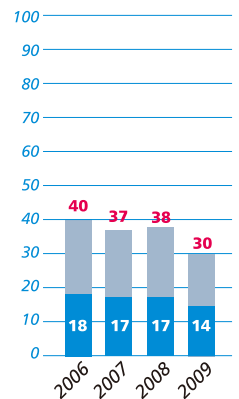
Sea of Okhotsk



93%



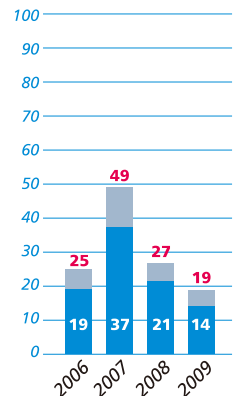
Northern Pacific



45%



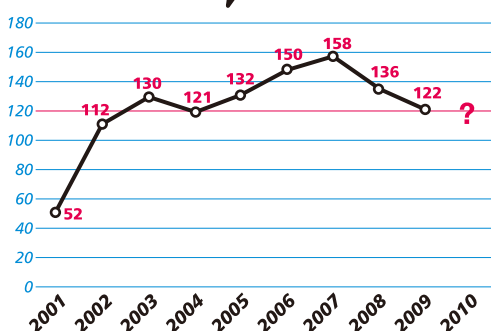
Southern Pacific



76%



Permitted number of by-caught whales for sale



▲ The Stranding Records and ICR newsletter no.444 (The distribution pattern of O-stock, and J-stock based on genetic information, p16, ICR 2009) published by Institute of Cetacean Research are used to determine the estimated number of by-caught J-stock. The numbers are rounded off to full figures. (Junko Sakuma)

Further details of current situation of J-stock can be found in the reports "SC-62-NPM11 pdf." and "SC-62-NPM pdf." put forward to WC62.

▲ In 2001, the reported number was from July 1st. Reference: The Fishery Agency, ICR

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Whale meat, possibly J-stock, sold at a port in Ishikawa prefecture, by Seaof Japan

A recent study showed that more than 300 J-stock minke whales have graced the tables of Japan and Korea. From both species conservation and a resource management view this is too large a number to dismiss. It even exceeds the provisional quota proposed by the Chair on April 22nd this year, which is 160 for both coastal and offshore catches.

This kind of whale by-catch is caused by the fixed fishnet fishery, practiced along the coasts of Japan. Some fishermen use the method to catch specific fish species such as salmon and yellowtail by setting up the fixed-net in their migration route. Others, however, are not targeting specific species and catching different fish depending on the seasons. This type of set-up is most likely where by-catch occurs – more than 100 species of fish can be caught by the fixed net, so whales chasing fish also get entangled in the net. Whales and fish stocks are managed by two different bodies, and therefore whales caught in the fixed-net are recognized simply as 'by-catch'.

In July 2001, the Japanese government eased regulation and allowed by-catch whales to be circulated commercially, under the condition that each whale's DNA is to be registered. Before this, by-caught whales were only permitted to be used by local people, under the worldwide moratorium on whaling. All registered whales are baleen whales and are mostly minke whales. By the end of 2009, 1113 animals had been registered and sold. The number of registered whales fluctuated between 120 to 130 annually, with the exception in 2006 and 2007 in which registration exceeded 150. When this new regulation was enacted the possibility of it resulting in active captures (such as by driving whales to the fixed-net) was mentioned, however it is still unclear whether this is the case.

Again, the number of commercially circulated by-caught whales is too large to be ignored. According to the 'stranding record' a report compiled by ICR, 3/4 of by-caught whales are of the rare, and still not well-known, J-stock. Moreover, Korean media reported that the official by-catch figure was about 200 minke whales, and introduced an expert's comment that the reality was closer to 400 whales being caught around the coasts of Korea every year (Yonhap news 11th January, 2008) It is likely that the by-caught minke whales around Korea are from J-stock living in the East Sea (or Sea of Japan) and the Yellow Sea.

Taking these aspects into consideration, we ask to the IWC member country and experts that:

- 1. Japan, China, DPRK, ROK and Russia should coordinate to research J-stock ecology including the actual by-catch conditions.**
- 2. By-catch should be regarded as comparable to whaling activity and therefore be subject to the resource management with RMP.**
- 3. By-catch should be regarded as comparable to whaling activity and therefore the Chair's proposal and the quota should include the numbers caught through by-catch.**