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Opinion Paper from IKAN

Research Whaling?

It's Time to Finally Stop.



Stop
Research
whaling!



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What's Scientific Research Whaling

On February 18th, 2011, the Japanese government announced a halt to its research whaling program in Antarctica for the year, an operation carried out by the Institute of Cetacean Research (ICR), to protect the workers and the ship from anti-whaling activities. Although this move made headlines the objective of the program and its progress is still unknown to most. So, let's have a closer look at the Japanese research whaling history, the path it's taking, and think about the path it should be taking.

International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling

Research whaling activities are based on article 8 of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW), which was ratified in 1946 to avoid competing nations from depleting whale stocks.

ICRW Article VIII

1. Notwithstanding anything contained in this Convention, any Contracting Government may grant to any of its nationals a special permit authorizing that national to kill, take, and treat whales for purposes of scientific research subject to such restrictions as to number and subject to such other conditions as the Contracting Government thinks fit, and the killing, taking, and treating of whales in accordance with the provisions of this Article shall be exempt from the operation of this Convention. Each Contracting Government shall report at once to the Commission all such authorizations which it has granted. Each Contracting Government may at any time revoke any such special permit which it has granted.

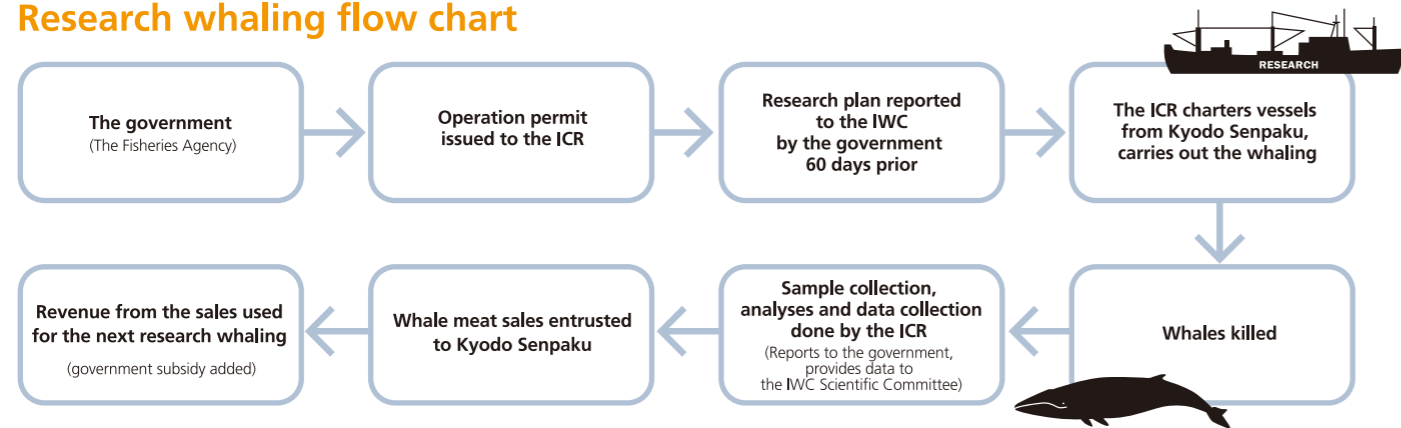
The history of research whaling: inherent risk of commercialization

Research whaling was first proposed in 1937 by the Norwegian scientist and politician Birger Bergersen, and was adopted as part of the ICRW in 1964 (IKA-NEWS No.46). This type of whaling was proposed in the midst of the commercial whaling era with the research designed to find new species and assess whale stock conditions. Later the objective was shifted to regulating over-whaling, which could cause a decline in whale stocks.

Since its inception, research whaling has been laden with risks of being used as a justification for catching banned whale species. Japan issued a permit to catch a maximum of 100 sperm whales in Antarctica and 200 along the Japanese coast between 1960's and 1970's (IKA-NEWS No.46). In 1976, a permit to catch 240 Bryde's whales was issued.

The International Whaling Commission (IWC) attempted to control whaling activities under the category of scientific research in 1985 by setting up guidelines and agreeing to evaluate applications for special permits. These regulations were adopted in 1986. Expanding on the success of the Bryde's whale permit, Japan developed another research whaling plan (The ICR 10th year publication). A resolution was adopted at the IWC stating that the new plan submitted by Japanese didn't satisfy requirements for scientific research, and subsequently the commission issued a recommendation to halt the plan. It didn't stop the Japanese government however, and a government permit was issued and the plan was implemented. Despite a number of resolutions repeatedly adopted by the IWC requesting a suspension of Japanese scientific whaling, the government continued to expand the activity by starting another program in the Western Pacific in 1994, and implemented the 2nd phase of the Antarctica operation in 2006.

Research whaling flow chart



Obstacles to the resumption of commercial whaling

Research whaling is supposedly employed to "resume commercial whaling" in the future, but in actuality, as the table below suggests, it would be very difficult to win IWC approval. Even if Japan secedes from the convention, it would be challenging to form another regional regulatory body without anti-whaling nations. For that reason, it seems that it is more "realistic" for the government to continue to produce and sell whale meat under the name of scientific research. (Table and article by Junko Sakuma)

Current background on commercial whaling	Requirements for resuming commercial whaling						Position on moratorium
	Remain in IWC				Leave IWC		
	To harvest minke whale			To harvest non-minke whales with mother ship-type whaling	To start whaling		
	Lift moratorium	Revised Management Procedure (RMP)	Revised Management Scheme (RMS)	Delete ICRW Schedule, art. 3, sec. 10d	Establish regional management body (as required by UNCLOS)		
Japan	Not possible	Requires 3/4 votes	Completed & agreed	Discussions at an impasse	Requires 3/4 votes	Establish regional management body	Withdraw objection to the moratorium
Norway	Possible (resumed in 1993)	Not required	Completed & agreed	Not required	Requires 3/4 votes	Operate under NAMMCO	Registered an objection to the moratorium
Iceland	Possible (resumed in 2007)	Not required	Completed & agreed	Not required	Requires 3/4 votes	Operate under NAMMCO	Rejoined IWC with a reservation to the moratorium

Aboriginal subsistence whaling (member countries)

Country	Whaling Type	Quota/Regulation
Denmark/Greenland	Local consumption	Requesting increased quota with population growth
The US (Alaska & Oregon)	Local consumption	Quota reviewed every 5 years
St. Vincent & The Grenadines	Local consumption	Quota reviewed every 5 years
Russia (Chukchi Peninsula)	Local consumption	Quota reviewed every 5 years

Aboriginal subsistence whaling (non-member countries)

Canada	Bowhead whales hunted by Inuit groups	Max.10 animals per yr
Indonesia		Max.10 animals per yr

Whales caught

The Antarctica

Species	Estimated population (by IWC)	IUCN Red list	Catch quota
Minke whale Antarctic minke	~'88/'89 761,000 (currently under review)	DD (data deficient)	1987~2005 ±330 2006~2010 ±850
Fin whale (Antarctica)	No records	EN (endangered)	±50
Humpback whale (Antarctica)	'97/'98 south of 60S summer time 42,000 (incomplete data)	LC (least concern)	±50

Northwestern Pacific

Species	Estimated population (by IWC)	IUCN Red list	Catch quota
Common minke whale Sea of Okhotsk and Sea of Japan (O-stock, J-stock)	25,000	LC (least concern) J-stock should be conserved by the Mammological Society of Japan	1994~2010 ±100 2000~2004 coastal research 60 2004~ coastal research 120
Sperm whale	No records	VU (vulnerable)	10
Bryde's whale	20,501	DD (data deficient)	50
Sei whale	No records	EN (endangered)	100

Fin Whale
Baleen
length: 18.8~20m
weight: 39.5~43.4t



Sperm Whale
Toothed
length: 11~20m
weight: 20~45t



Sei Whale
Baleen
length: 14m
weight: 15.9~17.8t



Humpback Whale
Baleen
length: 13~14m
weight: 30t



Bryde's whale
Baleen
length: 2.6~13m
length: 12~20t



Minke Whale
Baleen
length: 7~10m
length: 5~10t



What's Scientific Research Whaling

JARPA & JARPN

Japan's Whale Research Program Under Special Permit in Antarctica (JARPA)

Japan's Whale Research Program Under Special Permit in Antarctica (JARPA) started out assessing population size and mortality rates of minke whales in Antarctica in order to prove that it was possible to continue capturing whales without threatening the whale population. The actual implementation of the research plan was conducted by Kyodo Senpaku and the ICR, a group founded by whaling companies in the whaling era and morphed into an extra-governmental organization. In the last 18 years, 6,800 whales have been killed by this program.

The original catch quota was set at ~1,500 whales, which then was reduced to 825. Further, due to the criticisms from the IWC, the number of whales actually caught by 2004 was contained between 300 and 440. However, without a review by the IWC Scientific Committee, the government announced the 2nd phase of the Antarctica research plan in 2003 at the IWC meeting in Ulsan. The announced plan revealed that a new research objective had been added, which was to elucidate the

ecosystem in Antarctica, requiring the research to take not only minke whales but also 50 fin whales and 50 humpback whales. Including new species such as humpback whales, popular for whale watching, into its lethal research program, created a large uproar in the international community.

Japan's Whale Research Program in the Western North Pacific (JARPN)

JARPN started out in 1994 researching minke whale stock structure in three study blocks along the coast of Japan (west of 170E from Sanriku to the southern limit of the Kamchatka). From 2000, the objective to study the competition between whales and fishing industry was added, and sperm whales, Bryde's whales and sei whales were newly included in the quota. Furthermore, four coastal small-type whaling vessels have been used to take minke whales since 2002. The main objective of the study is to improve the knowledge of stock structure and feeding ecology, to build ecosystem models of the area.

	Area	Research objectives	Period	Target whales
JARPA	The Antarctic (international waters) In sanctuary	•Population estimate •Natural mortality rate and other ecological parameters •Stock structure •Ecological role of minke whale •Contaminants and other	1986/7 4~2004/5 (Nov-Mar)	Minke whale
JARPA II	The Antarctic (international waters) In sanctuary	•Ecosystem monitoring •Development of future cetacean resource management	2005/6 4~no limit (Nov-Mar)	Minke whale Humpback whale Fin whale
JARPN	Northwestern Pacific (EEZ +internationalwaters)	• Identify different minke whale stocks • Marine pollution	1994~1999/2000	Minke whale
JARPN II	Northwestern Pacific	• Development of ecosystem modeling • Understand the competition with fisheries • Marine pollution	2000~	Minke whale Sperm whale Bryde's whale Sei whale
Coastal research	Kushiro/Off Sanriku		2000~(Apr-May/Sep)	Minke whale

Institute of Cetacean Research (ICR) and Kyodo Senpaku

The ICR

The parent organization of the ICR, Nakabe Scientific Research Centre, named after the founder of Taiyo Fishery Co., Ltd. was established in 1941. In 1947, it changed its name to the Whale Research Institute, and then to the Japan Whaling Association, in which, what is now called Institute of Cetacean Research, was formed. Finally in 1987 with the launch of the first research whaling, ICR became an independent extra-governmental body under the Fisheries Agency, called The Institute of Cetacean Research.

Kyodo Senpaku

In 1976, due to the stagnation of whaling activities, whaling sections

from Taiyo Fishery Co., Ltd (presently Maruha Nichiro), Nippon Suisan Kaisha Ltd. (NISSUI), and Kyokuyo Hoge K.K. (presently Kyokuyo Co., Ltd) were amalgamated to create Kyodo Hoge ("whaling cooperative") K.K. In 1987, with the onset of the moratorium on commercial whaling, the name was modified to Kyodo Senpaku ("vessels cooperative"). The three vessels the cooperative possessed, one from each company, were reduced to one mother ship. Each company also held one third of the equity, but in 1999 Maruha transferred its shares to Taiyo A & F Co., Ltd. (TAFCO) and Delmar Co., Ltd, and Kyokuyo transferred a portion of its shares to Kyokuyo Suisan. By 2006, all stocks of Kyodo Senpaku were transferred to government-sponsored institutions such as the ICR.

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Evaluating Research Whaling

In Japan, research whaling tends to be viewed as the "science" providing evidence for the legitimacy of whaling against the foreign anti-whaling movement. This is without much review of its science, and whether it can actually provide sound scientific substantiation is yet to be seen. At the IWC, a review workshop with experts in the field studied the content of JARPA in 2006, and the Scientific Committee held a meeting on the program the following year. Another review workshop was held in 2009 for JARPN II, and a discussion by the Scientific Committee is scheduled to take place this year in time for the 6-year review of the program. In the following section, how international cetacean experts evaluate Japanese research whaling is introduced.

JARPA

The IWC Scientific Committee conducted a review on JARPA in 2006, and the results were discussed at the committee meeting the following year.

For details, please see

<http://iwcoffice.org/conservation/jarpa.htm>

Although the evaluations were made on JARPA's various studies, the main focus of the review was on the minke whale stock structure analysis, and whether the stocks were robust enough to withstand the whaling pressure – the main objective that formed the basis for the Japanese government to start the research. The 2006 review reported that the estimated population (by visual observation) and the natural mortality rate were inconclusive from the 18-year study.

1. Stock abundance and trends

The estimated population of Antarctic minke whales (whether the abundance has drastically decreased, increased or more or less stabilized) is, in short, still in disagreement within the committee due to conflicting estimation methodologies.

2. Estimated natural mortality rate

Although the main objectives of JARPA were to determine the stock size estimate and the natural mortality rate, the mortality rate has been inconclusive from the 18-year study.

JARPN

JARPN's original objective was to elucidate the competition between whales and fishing resources. Claiming that the increasing whale populations were threatening fisheries minke whale feeding ecology was studied; but the program made little progress. Fish are eaten mostly by other fish and the decline in the abundance of commercial fish is most likely due to overfishing. At the IWC meeting in 2009, the Japanese government made a note that they were merely researching the possibility of the relationship and did not believe that whales were eating all the fish. However, domestically the government put on a misleading campaign, giving people the impression that the whales were doing exactly that.

3. Other

At least two Antarctic minke stocks were identified in the research area by the study. The trend in these populations is currently being researched by non-lethal methods, and their migratory routes have been elucidated and the breeding grounds are identified in the western and eastern coasts of Africa. This progress made by non-lethal research, which seems to be having more fruitful results than lethal methods, has been reported to the committee.

The ecosystem modeling analysis based on cetacean and krill feeding ecology is evaluated as insufficient due to the limited research coverage (the study only includes baleen whales). As various krill feeders such as penguins, seals and sea birds should be taken into account, the IWC has been advising Japan to request for support from Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), which has abundant data and research analyses in the related field, but Japan has shown little interest thus far. ups or in individuals, or in what sea level the animals fed.

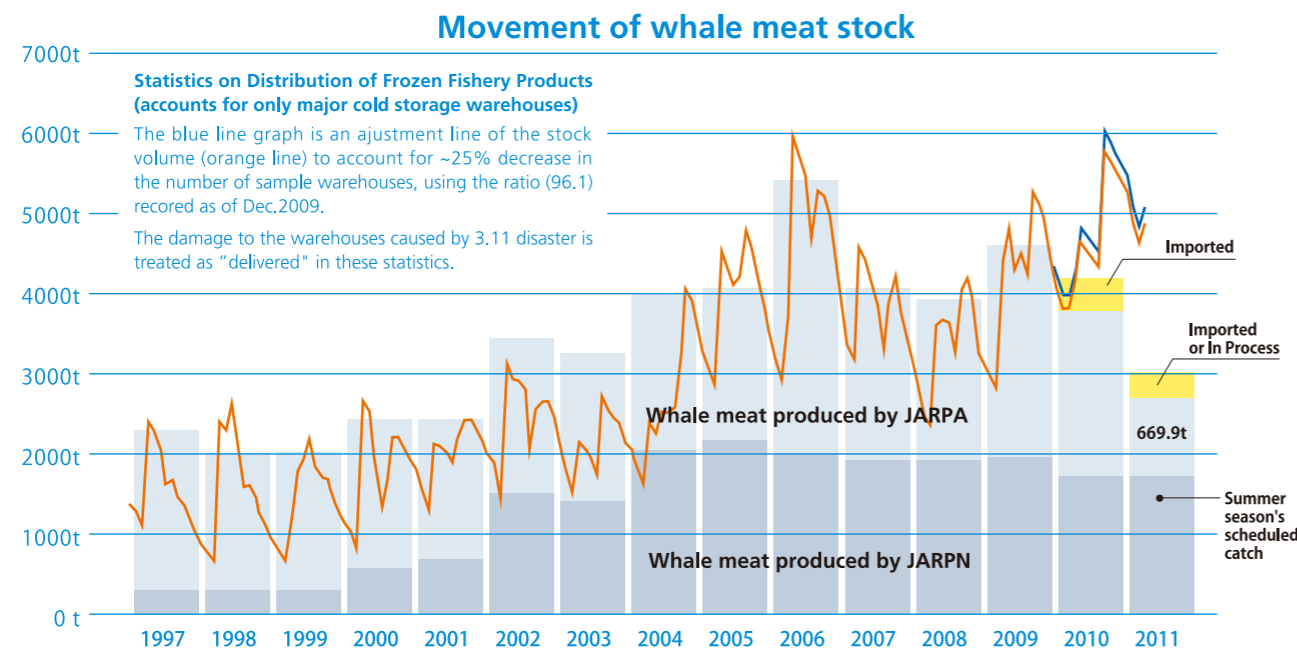
The symposium "Northwestern Pacific Marine Ecosystem Surrounding Cetaceans" was held by the Japanese Society of Fisheries Oceanography last November. Dissatisfaction on the content of the research was prevalent among the participants, as the study lacked consideration of the effects of climate change, something that would have a significant impact on the ecosystem, and even though JARPN objective is to study minke whale feeding ecology, the hosts could not answer simple questions like whether the whales fed in groups or in individuals, or in what sea level the animals fed.

Looking at whale meat sales

The revenue from whale meat covers most of the expenditure of Japanese scientific whaling, creating a system where the research program cannot be sustained without lethal methods and the subsequent meat sales.

When you look at the whale meat supply level and the meat stored in major warehouses indicated in the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries' fisheries distribution statistics

data, there is an increasing trend for the stock volume relative to the increase in the production level, since around 2000. From 2010, the stock volume continued to increase despite the decrease in production volume suggesting a decline in consumption level. Also, cheap Icelandic whale meat began circulating in the market in 2010, and whale meat sales from research whaling are now facing an even more difficult situation.



Since 2006, there is a trend of decreasing whale meat production. Not only due to intrusions from overseas environmental groups, but also the reduction in budget and organization contribute to this production loss.

Reference: Statistics on Fisheries Product Distribution (水産物流通統計) "Monthly loading and unloading of major products and the month-end delivered and stock volume" (relegated from MAFF to Fisheries Processing Industries and Marketing Division) in the ICR year book, press releases and media articles,

Killing large migratory mammals in the international waters: What about consent from the international community?

The statement "scientific data that would form the basis is required" in order to continue whaling may seem like an easy concept, but when it comes to the question about the need to kill whales for research, not only has there been no international consensus, but it has also never been discussed within Japan. It has become the norm to use non-lethal research methods for terrestrial animals, with various techniques being developed. The IWC scientific permit methodology guideline stresses that lethal research only be carried out in the absence of alternative non-lethal means and/or the information not available from the analysis of existing data. To this, the government claims that the Japanese research program utilizes "a combination of both lethal and non-lethal techniques" and that through lethal research valuable data has been obtained.

Many non-lethal techniques are now available

While visual survey is utilized for the abundance estimate, the government claims that lethal techniques have made progress in obtaining other data such as genetic analyses, feeding ecology and age structure. However, compared to the time when ICRW was established, the development of biopsy of tissue sample techniques can obtain abundant biological information. Australia launched a research program in 2009 to understand whale ecology in the southern hemisphere under IWC, using only non-lethal methods. It is far more logical for countries in the area to conduct research in alliance, instead of Japan traveling across the globe, and leave them to carry out transparent studies under the guidance of the IWC Scientific Committee.



The major reason why the Japanese government prefers lethal methods is the byproduct from the research is sold to cover the research cost. It is highly questionable whether such research system can form a basis for real scientific study and whether it can gain international support. It can also not be ignored that we, as taxpayers, are responsible for the government pouring (tax) money every year into, what they call state policy, research whaling programs.

Research program that depends on byproduct sales (+ tax money)

Some government officials tried to improve the sluggish whale meat sales by increasing catch quota and species, claiming, "the slump in sales is attributed to the high price of the meat." The result is excessive amounts of meat in stock, showing us that there is only a limited demand in Japan.

Former major whaling companies already pulled out

Companies that used to be major players in the whaling industry have already moved on from economically unviable commercial whaling. It is time to start the discussion within Japan to form a national strategy that is more suitable for the future of Japan.

Various opinions on research whaling

Toshio Kasuya in Mainichi Shimbun (Oct 3rd, 2005)

At the time [of proposing the first research whaling plan,] we were given the assignment to come up with research objectives that would require enough whale samples to cover the cost and would not end in the short term. I regret now, for taking part in the development of a program that is conducted through a legal loophole.

Tomohiko Taniguchi in WEDGE 2009 (Jan 29th, 2009)

Japan is seeking two paths: one is the resumption of commercial whaling, as opposed to the current research whaling, and the other is the continuation of coastal small-type whaling. But these two can't be achieved concurrently. Research whaling produces a large quantity of minke whale meat, and by distributing this "delicacy food" the market becomes saturated, creating a vicious cycle where coastal whaling cannot improve its profitability. What I'm trying to say is, instead of trying so hard to shift the research whaling to commercial, quit research whaling all together and use that for negotiation to establish a system where the coastal small-type whaling, rooted in regional culture, makes more business sense.

Shohei Yonemoto in Big Issue Japan No.145 (June 15th, 2010)

For studying large wild animals, it is most common to attach a tag to the animals and track their movement. Other methods make use of already dead samples and the ones culled for pest control. Killing animals for the purpose of research is taboo. Pouring 6 billion yen and continuing to kill 400 whales every year in the Antarctica alone, and still can't come up with an effective conclusion on the possibility of reopening commercial whaling is a total failure as a scientific research project.

C.W. Nicol in Mainichi Shimbun (Jul 2nd, 2010)

I was in support of the Japanese government's official goal to reopen the commercial whaling of species with an abundant stock, in a sustainable way, and under international regulation. The key was "sustainable" and "international regulation," but considering the cost factor of travelling to the Antarctica, the interference on water at the research sites and the backlash from other countries and overseas media, I think it can hardly be "sustainable." Even so, Japan should maintain its research in the Antarctica by non-lethal methods for cetaceans and studying the ocean and climate in the area, under the international cooperation. I believe the culture and the techniques of whaling can be preserved and developed by coastal whaling.

Future of Research Whaling: Opinion Paper from IKAN



For the first time ever, the government hosted a review session on the research whaling programs and invited various experts. However, the review session was still far from perfect as it was held behind closed doors (partially opened to the media) and only the handouts and the minutes of the meeting were made available to the public afterwards. The title of the session was changed from Reviewing Research Whaling to Sustaining Stable Research Whaling.

The panel is to announce its conclusion after its last meeting scheduled in July. This is an opportunity we should not miss to reflect public opinion in the government's decision. Please join us in sending your voices on research whaling.

Please Stop Research Whaling Immediately

Iruka & Kujira (Dolphin & Whale) Action Network

Prime Minister Naoto Kan
Mr. Takeaki Matsumoto Minister of Foreign Affairs
Mr. Michihiko Kano Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
Mr. Masanori Sato Director General of Fisheries Agency of Japan

We have been making requests to stop Japanese research whaling programs for some time. Considering the research hunt taking place in Antarctica, it became clear from the review of the research that the objectives of elucidating the minke stock abundance and their natural mortality rate have not been met thus far in the programs. With the government spending much tax money on these programs, citizens who question the study are now not rare.

A review session was held on the research programs for the first time in Japan, but the evaluation on the necessity of continuing the programs was far from sufficient, and impartial reviews that should have focused on the major controversies surrounding the programs were rarely made. Furthermore, the only discussion made on the 'anti-whaling movement' was criticisms of activities done by a few prominent organizations. It is doubtful that the review session, which was closed to the public and contained limited witnesses at the hearing, reflected the various opinions of Japanese citizens.

The research area under the Japanese program is in international waters and the whales that are killed for research are migratory animals moving beyond national boundaries, thus in order to take these animals international consent is a must. If the government of Japan wishes to continue such activities, more efforts should be placed to negotiate and gain understanding from the anti-whaling countries, instead of simply claiming sovereign rights.

We hope the government takes this opportunity to finally halt research whaling programs and start facing the international community with true sincerity.



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