

Fact Sheet: The Whale Meat Market in Japan

The whale meat market in Japan is too small to consume the extra large amount of whale product that Icelandic whalers hope to export to Japan. Since most of the citizens have chosen to longer eat whale meat, Japan is in a situation where even the government is unable to get rid of the huge stockpile of whale meat produced by its own whaling programme. Dealing in whale meat in the nation has become a loss making, low-credibility business that even the national fishing industry avoids. A director of Asian Trading Co. Ltd., who was in charge of the recent whale meat import from Iceland, has told Greenpeace that there is no market in Japan and that he is not planning another import from Iceland.

According to Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA)¹, over 80% of Icelandic exports are for EU and USA, and 90% of the 14.8 billion yen (4.2% of Icelandic exports, US \$150 million) worth of Icelandic exports to Japan in 2008 was fishery products (halibut 21.5%, rockfish 19.7%, capelin 18.4%, etc.). It is wiser to find other opportunities to improve Iceland's economic situation, rather than entering the tiny Japanese whale meat market and increasing chances for Icelandic industries, such as fishery, eco-tourism, and natural energy, to be internationally damaged by ignoring global concerns about Iceland's whaling.

There is ample evidence to claim that no whale meat market exists for imported whale products in Japan. Greenpeace would like point out the following:

The almost invisible market: The majority of people in Japan do not eat whale meat

1. Kyodo Senpaku, the company that both owns the whaling vessels used by Japan's "research" whaling programme and sells the whale meat as a 'byproduct' of the programme, concluded on June 2008, as part of its market research, that the annual national average of the estimated amount of whale meat being sold as a 'byproduct' of "research" whaling was 50.2 grams² (equivalent to amount only about 3-4 slices of Sashimi). For comparison, annual seafood consumption national average is about 60 kg per person at low estimate; the scale of whale meat is only about 0.08% of that.
2. The three major fisheries companies, Maruha Nichiro Holdings, Nihon Suisan, and Kyokuyo, which were key enterprises in commercial whaling, have revealed that even if the ban on commercial whaling is lifted, they have no intention of re-entering the business. In the article on the second biggest daily newspaper in Japan released on June 2008³,

¹ <http://www.mofa.go.jp/MOFAJ/area/iceland/data.html>

² Kyodo News, 4 June 2008, Nagasaki in First Place, Former Bases in Top Ranks of Estimated Consumption of Whale meat from Research Whaling.

³The Asahi Shinbun, 13 June 2008: Big Three Fisheries Companies Say No to Re-entering Business of Commercial Whaling Business, "Not a Good Thing" "Young

- A reprehensive board member and senior managing director of Nihon Suisan, Yasuhisa Sato is quoted “people who used to eat it in the past probably miss it, but other meats are more delicious,”
 - A senior managing director of Kyokuyo, Hisaki Tada, is quoted “young people don’t eat whale.”
3. An opinion poll conducted in Japan by Nippon Research Center (a member of Gallup International Association) in 2008⁴ shows that among all the responders:
- More responders mention “whale watching” rather than “whale dish” when they were asked what images come to their mind when they hear the word “whale.”
 - 95% either consume whale meat very rarely or never consume at all.
 - 90% think that demand for whale meat in Japan will not increase in the future.
4. Taniguchi Tomohiko, a former deputy press secretary of MOFA, has written that whale meat for the majority of Japanese now only has significance as a rare delicacy, and that its economic rationale has already gone⁵.
5. A director of Asian Trading Co. Ltd., a company cited on the export license only reactivated his company as a "favour for a friend in Iceland"⁶, agreed to a phone interview with Greenpeace in May 2009 (See Appendix). This director, who used to import whale meat from Hvalur hf. owned by Mr. Kristjan Loftsson, some 20 years ago, told Greenpeace that the nationwide annual consumption of all cetacean meat, including meat of dolphins, Baird’s beaked whale, and other non-‘byproduct’ of “research” whaling in Japan, was 4,000 tonnes⁷, about 0.05% of Japan’s seafood consumption. This importer also emphasized that there had been not much demand for the whale meat he recently imported, that there would be no capacity in the market in Japan to consume the extra amount of whale meat that Iceland has announced it will to produce, and that he was not planning further imports. He also mentioned that the consumption of whale meat in the nation was such low mainly because:
- Japan’s economy is in bad depression
 - The younger generation does not eat whale meat
 - Lifestyle of the nation has improved, and there is no need to eat such thing nowadays
 - Global whale conservation campaigns are working effectively

People Don’t Eat Whale Meat”

⁴ 14 February 2008: Opinion Poll on Research Whaling Internet Survey
<http://www.greenpeace.org/raw/content/international/press/reports/japanese-opinion-whaling-2008.pdf>

⁵ “Wedge” Magazine, published in Japan, Feb 2009. Inside story on Japan’s whaling that the media doesn’t report. -Investing taxes, losing friends-

⁶ According to the company register of the Asian Trading Co. Ltd., the company’s director and senior management staff resigned in June 2004, leaving the company inactive. The director re-registered the company on 20 May 2008.

⁷ Transcript: Director of Asian Trading Company Ltd. in conversation with Wakao Hanaoka of Greenpeace, concerning the company’s import of whale meat to Japan from Iceland and Norway, 7 May 2009 (Selected excerpt from the original Japanese, translated by Greenpeace)

Stockpiles of Inventory creates deficit-operating business

6. Statistics on the Distribution of Frozen Marine Products (Main Refrigerated Warehouses Nationwide)⁸ from Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) shows that there is about 4,000 tonnes of whale meat being constantly stored in refrigerated storages, that are subjects of MAFF research, although the "research" whaling programme has been producing only about 60% of whale meat from its original targets for 3 continuous years (Noting that there are many refrigerated storages that are not subject of MAFF research in the nation, and the amount of whale meat stored in such storages does not show up in the statistics).
7. The Asahi Shinbun, the second biggest daily newspaper in Japan, released on February 2008 that⁹:
 - The volume of inventory has surged: what was once 2,000 tonnes increased suddenly to 3,000-4,000 tonnes in the latter half of '04, and 5,969 tonnes at the end of April '06. This exceeded the highest annual volume of supply of '05~'06 (5,560 tonnes). "This is unheard of at an ordinary company." (Certified public accountant at a major auditing firm)
8. Japanese media has reported that due to lack of demand, the operational body of Japan's whaling programme is operating in deficit. The Institute for Cetacean research (ICR), which carries out the whaling for supposed scientific reasons, depends financially on profits from the sale of whale meat, but was said to be unable to pay 1 billion yen out of operating funds of 3.6 billion yen that it had borrowed free of interest from the government¹⁰.
9. In order to reduce the huge inventory of meat, MAFF and the ICR established a whale meat distribution company, Geishoku-Labo in 2006. It was reported in 2008 that Geishoku-Labo sales were a mere fraction of what was expected at the end of second accounting term, while negative earnings of 20 million yen (US\$200,000) in the first year and 15 million yen (US\$155,000) in the second were predicted¹¹.
10. The article also mentioned that Geishoku-Labo founder Mr. Nakata had invested more than 10 million yen (USD \$100,000) of his own money into the whaling programme, while Kyodo Senpaku supplied Geishoku Labo with whale meat practically free of charge – by covering the cost itself.

⁸ Statistics on Distribution of Frozen Marine Products (Main Refrigerated Warehouses Nationwide) from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries <http://www.maff.go.jp/www/info/bunrui/bun06.html#tsuki4>

⁹ The Asahi Shimbun Morning Edition, 19 February 2008, Unsold whale meat worries, increased supply unmet by stagnant distribution, national policy-supporting distributor faces continuing losses

¹⁰ The Asahi Shimbun, 2 February 2008, Research Whaling: Pinched for Funds

¹¹ The Asahi Shimbun, 19 February 2008, Unsold whale meat worries, increased supply unmet by stagnant distribution, national policy-supporting distributor faces continuing losses

Geishoku Labo was since forced to sell off whale meat at cut-rate prices in order to get rid of stock¹².

11. The ICR and Kyodo Senpaku announced together on November 2008 that due to ongoing financial problems they had decided to cancel open-boat departure ceremonies and close "Yushin", its iconic whale meat shop in Tokyo, by 2010, as a rationalization plan¹³.

Low-credible business that the national fishery industry avoids

12. In the newspaper article about the three major fisheries companies, Maruha Nichiro Holdings, Nihon Suisan, and Kyokuyo revealed no intention of re-entering the whale meat business, released on June 2008¹⁴, a board member of Nihon Suisan, Kunihiko Koike, is quoted "as a company selling fish worldwide, there would be absolutely no good in being involved in whaling."
13. The director of Asian Trading Co. Ltd. said that¹⁵ he had had hard time finding a refrigerated storage company to store the imported storage, because most directors of fishery companies in Japan take the position of "letting sleeping dogs lie" and abide by don't-rock-the-boat principles. He is currently struggling to find a sales network.
14. Greenpeace on March 2008 conducted a questionnaire survey targeted at 24 top companies in industries capable of handling whale meat in Japan, in order to investigate sales trends for whale meat in the nation¹⁶. In this survey it was found that, among others, the top 5 companies in the supermarket industry – which is the backbone of food distribution and directly linked to general consumers – know about the environmental problems and international problems related to whaling and do not sell whale meat or else sell it unenthusiastically.

¹² AP, June 21 2008: Japanese whalers stand firm as controversy grows
http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5hj78tnITCjTZHDp8_d7kkSz6VfjA

¹³ Nikkei, 11 November 2008: The Institute of Cetacean Research and whaling fleet operators Kyodo Senpaku announced a rationalisation plan, including the cancellation of open-boat departure ceremonies and the closing of "Yushin", its whale meat shop in Asakusa, Tokyo, by 2010.

¹⁴The Asahi Shinbun, 13 June 2008: Big Three Fisheries Companies Say No to Re-entering Business of Commercial Whaling Business, "Not a Good Thing" "Young People Don't Eat Whale Meat"

¹⁵ Transcript: Director of Asian Trading Company Ltd. in conversation with Wakao Hanaoka of Greenpeace, concerning the company's import of whale meat to Japan from Iceland and Norway, 7 May 2009 (Selected excerpt from the original Japanese, translated by Greenpeace)

¹⁶ Greenpeace Report, 6 March 2008, Results of Survey on Trends in Whale Meat Sales – The top companies in various industries don't sell whale meat, or do so unenthusiastically –

Appendix

Transcript

Director of Asian Trading Co. Ltd., In conversation with Wakao Hanaoka, Greenpeace, concerning the company's import of whale meat to Japan from Iceland and Norway.

7 May 2009

06:45 – 07:00 STD

(Selected excerpt from the original Japanese, translated by Greenpeace)

- Greenpeace:** How are the sales of the imported whale meat so far? I wonder how much demand there is in the market.
- The Importer:** Well, you know, the entire world is like this, its depression.
- Greenpeace:** So not only the whale meat that is selling badly, but tuna, beef, etc...
- The Importer:** They are all selling poorly. Nowhere pays money. Banks do not pay money. To be frank with you, there is not much demand [for the imported whale meat] since the business is so slack.
- Greenpeace:** Are you planning another import?
- The Importer:** You know, the situation is like this right now...
- Greenpeace:** You mean even if you import more there will be no demand, and the stockpile increase?
- The Importer:** Well, nothing can be sold now. Most of seafood product trade is remaining stagnant.
- Greenpeace:** So you are not planning another import at this stage?
- The Importer:** No, I do not plan anything at the moment.
- Greenpeace:** Are you sure?
- The Importer:** Yes.
- Greenpeace:** Allow me to repeat the question I asked you the last time we spoke; You mentioned that you had a hard time finding a refrigerated storage company [that would store the imported whale meat].
- The Importer:** The heads of fishery companies used not to feel apprehensive about such things, but nowadays most of them are from banks and they are cowards. They don't do the [whale meat business] since they always abide by don't-rock-the-boat principles. They are too scared to touch any risk, and the refrigerated storage companies also do not want to be touched by someone like [Greenpeace]. Most

fishery companies nowadays take a position of “let sleeping dogs lie”.

Greenpeace: It must be hard to find a sales network.

The Importer: You are right. Your campaign is very effective.

Greenpeace: You must know that the Iceland whaler starts large-scale whaling next month since he thinks there is a market in Japan.

The Importer: Oh yeah? (Sounds surprised and didn't know)

Greenpeace: Seems like it.

The Importer: Oh yeah? (Sounds surprised again)

Greenpeace: It was few-tens or just few [whales hunted] until last year, but I heard that the whaler said he would hunt 150 fin whales this year and export 90% of them to Japan since there's a market in Japan.

The Importer: But there's no market in Japan!

Greenpeace: I agree.

The Importer: You must know the best. Japanese do not consume that much [whale meat]. Do you know how many tonnes [of whale meat] Japanese consume annually? 4000 tones, annually. Do you understand that currently the annual consumption is only 4000 tonnes in Japan? This includes everything, dolphins and Baird's Beaked whale and others. With a market of only 4000 tonnes consumption... well, how many tonnes would it be if Iceland [killed 150 fin whales]?

Greenpeace: It's about the same as... [Japan's annual consumption]

The Importer: Exactly.

Greenpeace: If that amount of meat comes into Japan...

The Importer: There is absolutely no way to consume that much, right?

Greenpeace: No way.

The Importer: You are right. It is just impossible. The consumption has dropped now. There's no consumption now. Why? There are many reasons. Your campaign must be a big part of it. And also young generations do not eat [whale meat].

Greenpeace: Food culture has been westernized.

The Importer: It is too expensive.

The Importer: The biggest reason must be the improvement of lifestyle. Japanese people have become rich. There is no need to eat such things now. It must be the reason.

Greenpeace: You used to import whale meat from the same Icelandic exporter 20 year ago, right?

The Importer: Right.

Greenpeace: That is why you previously answered my question that you did not understand the details of this deal, since you were only really helping your old friend.

The Importer: That is right for this case, now, and in future.