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Understanding the “Coastal Whaling” proposals Japan and the Coastal Whaling Trade-Off 20 May 2009

On May 11th2009, Richard Black of the BBC revealed that, as part of what is billed as a peace process at the IWC, Japan had offered to reduce its 'scientific' catch of whales in Antarctic waters to 650 per year – just 29 less than it killed last season - in return for being given a quota of 150 whales a year in Japanese coastal waters. While it was well known that such negotiations were in train, the BBC got to see a draft document that detailed the numbers of whales being discussed, plus the failure of the talks. The BBC report stated that “moves to make a peace deal between pro and anti-whaling nations have stalled, with no chance of agreement this year.”

Whaling peace talks 'fall short': <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/8042713.stm>”

This revelation was backed up by the official Report of the Small Working Group (SWG) on the Future of the International Whaling Commission, 18 May 2009, which stated that the “Small Working Group” had failed to reach agreement on a proposal in which Japan would give up whaling in the Southern Ocean in exchange for being allowed limited coastal whaling. As a result, it was proposed to continue the discussions until the 2010 meeting (IWC62), instead of reaching a solution by this year’s meeting (http://www.iwcoffice.org/_documents/commission/IWC61docs/61-6.pdf)

However, even if no agreement on whaling trade-offs occur at the IWC61 in Madeira, it’s important to understand the intricacies and issues surrounding the concept of coastal whaling of Japan.

Greenpeace’s Position on Coastal Whaling

Greenpeace is opposed to all commercial whaling – this includes Japan’s so-called whaling programme in the Southern Ocean and North Pacific, and any proposed expansion of coastal whaling off Japan. The proposals made by jointly by the IWC Chair and the SWG Chair to trade reductions in Antarctic whaling, in return for Japanese coastal whaling would provide an endorsement Japan’s so-called scientific whaling programme.

Japan's offer to reduce its Antarctic catch by 29 whales, in return for the reopening of coastal whaling in Japan, is both absurd and an insult to the conservation-minded nations who hold the majority at the International Whaling Commission. Greenpeace believes that the only acceptable number of whales killed in the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary is zero. Japan appears to have no intention in cooperating, so conservation-minded countries must get serious about taking Japan to task, if the IWC is to transform itself into a modern organization.

Japan's whaling programme has never been scientifically supported by the IWC's Scientific Committee, and has remained opposed by an IWC majority for over two decades. Japan's proposed coastal whaling would be conducted where endangered inshore or "J-Stock" minke whales mix with the less vulnerable but still depleted offshore "O-Stock" minke whales. There is no way for whalers to tell which population a target whale comes from until it is dead.

In any event, coastal whaling off Japan is not a way to solve the whaling issue; The Japanese government and other IWC members must commit to ending Southern Ocean whaling, but not to the detriment of other whale populations.

Background on the Chairs' proposal Coastal whaling in Japan

The Chairs' proposal to trade Antarctic whaling for coastal whaling in Japanese waters came in two alternatives: a phase out of Antarctic whaling to zero, over several years, or a reduction of Antarctic catch to a lower level. In return Japan would be given a coastal quota.

Agreeing the second proposal would be a lose-lose situation for the whales. It would legitimise two whaling operations at once. "Scientific" whaling in the Antarctic would be transformed from an activity consistently opposed for two decades by a majority within the IWC, to one officially endorsed by the Commission. This would enable Japan to continue to keep its dream of distant water commercial whaling alive, while also collecting more questionable data to support its drive to reopen Antarctic commercial whaling.

Coastal whaling in Japanese waters, as proposed, would be conducted on minke whales in an area where endangered "J stock" mixes with the less depleted "O stock". Since there is no way to tell whales from the two populations apart until they are on the deck of a whaling ship, there is a serious risk of hunting "J stock" whales, further depleting the population. The "O stock" itself is depleted below its pristine level, but the IWC does not yet have enough information to apply its precautionary management plan, the RMP (Revised Management Procedure). Japan is already taking over 300 minke whales a year near Japan (220 via 'scientific' whaling and about 100 a year in net entanglements - all entangled whales are killed and marketed) - a level similar to the commercial hunt before the moratorium came into effect. A total of 120 minke whales a year from the 'scientific' hunt, which has repeatedly been condemned by the IWC, is taken by the same small-type catcher boats that operated the commercial hunt before the moratorium.

It has been suggested that Japan could be given a commercial quota of minke whales by transferring some out of the 'scientific' quota. This would simply underline the lack of science in 'scientific' whaling and legitimise a quota that has never been given any scientific support, and has consistently been opposed within the IWC. If an ad hoc quota is granted to Japan, this could open the door to the granting of quotas to any other country that demands it. At the March 2009 intersessional IWC meeting in Rome, South Korea, whose waters share the "O" and "J stocks with Japan, said that if Japan were given a coastal quota they would want one too.

Q&A

The expansion of coastal whaling, does this mean the shore-based boats, or the Nisshin Maru, or both?

We don't know, because there have been no specifics discussed – at least not our knowledge. Japan refers to wanting 'small type coastal whaling' but there is no such thing defined by the IWC. Small type whaling is defined by the hunting of a limited set of species that includes minke

whales, orcas and Baird's beaked whales, but not any of the great whales *beyond* minke whales. So Japan's JARPA operations in the Antarctic would qualify as small type whaling, except when they catch fin whales. Japan would more than likely want to hunt Bryde's whales coastally.

Does the trade-off mean in reality an increase in the north pacific hunt, or is there a distinction between coastal (inside EEZ?) whaling and the north pacific hunt?

Again this is not certain. Japan has raised the possibility of converting some of its 'scientific' take into a commercial take, which would leave the total number being taken untouched.

What's the geographical distinction here - if any; do the coastal whalers currently operate inside the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and the *Nisshin Maru* operation outside?

The current situation is that the 'scientific' whalers have a quota of 380 whales

Species	Quota
minke	220
sei	100
brydes	50
sperm	10

The minke quota is sub divided into 2 parts - 120 which are taken by small type catchers, close to the coast, and 100 that are taken by catchers attached to the *Nisshin Maru*. The 120 is further divided into 2 lots of 60 which are taken in different areas [and the areas move by time and by location from year to year] The others are all taken by the *Nisshin Maru* fleet which is largely, but not entirely, operating on the high seas or at least a long way out from the coast. Only five or so sperm whales are taken each year - the meat is of no value.

Why would coastal whaling increase risk to the J stock?

The "J stock" tends to stay close to the shore. So if Japan shifted to more coastal based whaling, this population would be more at risk.

The current *Nisshin Maru* operations in the North Pacific, are they in the "O Stock" area only?

Whaling ships further out to sea see a lot less "J stock", but it is not a clean dividing line.

Notes:

IWC Small Working Group Report

http://www.iwcoffice.org/_documents/commission/IWC61docs/61-6.pdf