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US sushi supplier under fire over 'raw' deal

10/04/2007

WASHINGTON, April 10, 2007 (AFP) - Global environment groups on Tuesday urged a top US sushi meat supplier to pressure its new Japanese partner, seafood dealer Kyokuyo, to cease its controversial whalemeat trade.

Kyokuyo recently partnered with True World Foods to begin marketing its new frozen sushi product in the United States as early as this summer.

But Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), Humane Society International (HSI) and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) urged American grocery stores to think twice before placing the new product on their shelves.

"Through its sales of millions and millions of cans of whale meat in Japan each year, Kyokuyo is a driving force behind Japan's expanding commercial whaling industry," EIA president Allan Thornton told reporters.

"We appeal to True World Foods to use their influence to persuade Kyokuyo to immediately end their massive sale of whale meat and to uphold international laws that protect great whales from commercial hunting," he said.

True World Foods representatives were not immediately available for comment.

The International Whaling Commission banned commercial whaling in 1986 but Japan, which says whaling is part of its culture, uses a loophole that allows whaling for scientific research, with the meat going on sale. It hunts about 1,000 of the giant mammals a year.

In a report Tuesday entitled "Raw Deal," EIA said that although Kyokuyo divested its shares in a commercial whaling company in March last year, it remained closely involved in the industry as a major producer and distributor of whalemeat.

"No respectable business should want to be associated with the cruel and inhumane killing of one of the world's most magnificent animals," said Kitty Block, HSI's director of treaty law, oceans, and wildlife protection.

Patrick Ramage, IFAW's global whale campaign manager, said by buying sushi marketed by Kyokuyo, American shoppers were in effect backing Japan's whale hunt.

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