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CAMPAIGNERS DEMAND GOVERNMENTS UNITE AGAINST JAPAN'S MASSIVE PORPOISE HUNT

IWC Meeting, St. Kitts; Campaigners today called upon International Whaling Commission (IWC) Member Governments to unite in opposition to Japan's ongoing mass slaughter of Dall's porpoises. This year, Japan expects to gain a voting majority at the IWC meeting in St Kitts for the first time in over 25 years, and will use this majority on the opening day to prevent any discussion of dolphin and porpoise hunts at the IWC.

Japanese fishermen have slaughtered at least 350,000 Dall's porpoises since commercial whaling was banned in 1986. It is the largest hunt of any cetacean (whale, dolphin or porpoise) species in the world, and has been for a quarter of a century. This year, as many as 17,700 porpoises will be harpooned, with the meat sold commercially, often mislabelled as 'whale' meat. Recent scientific studies reveal that the porpoise meat is heavily polluted posing a serious public health risk to people that eat it.

Campaign Whale and the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) are demanding that Member States oppose Japan's attempt to silence discussion on this serious conservation issue and demand the immediate suspension of the Dall's porpoise hunt.

"Dolphins and porpoises in Japan have paid a terrible price for the international ban on the hunting of larger whales," said EIA senior campaigner, Clare Perry. "Japan is trying to hide this hunt by using its voting power to stop any discussion in the IWC. This makes a mockery of Japan's claim that it wants to manage whales sustainably and based on scientific advice."

The IWC has repeatedly called upon Japan to provide catch data and population estimates to its Scientific Committee in order that the status of the Dall's porpoise populations can be assessed. Despite these requests, and an IWC Resolution calling upon Japan to suspend the Dall's hunt, the Japanese Government continues the slaughter regardless.

Japanese fishermen kill an average of 20,000 smaller whales and dolphins each year. However, it is the Dall's porpoise that has borne the brunt of this slaughter.

"The Dall's porpoise is being slaughtered at a rate similar to that which pushed so many whale species to the brink of extinction." said Campaign Whale Director Andy Ottaway, "the IWC must act before Dall's porpoises are wiped out in Japanese waters."

A briefing entitled 'Stop the Dall's Disaster' still pictures and video clips are available.

NOTES:

- The IWC Scientific Committee has expressed its concern over the unsustainability of Japan's Dall's porpoise hunt 12 times in the last 16 years.
- The number of Dall's porpoises killed each year ?without taking into account the unknown numbers of animals struck and lost, unreported, taken as bycatch, or calves left to die ?is around double the IWC's recommended limit of human induced mortality for porpoise species.
- Japan has noted its intention to remove any discussion of small cetaceans from the IWC agenda, and intends to use its majority vote to hide its appalling record of small cetacean management.
- Dall's porpoises are speared with hand-thrown harpoons attached to floats as they bow-ride the hunting boats. Fishermen then pursue the rest of the group, leaving the struck animals to die. Harpooned porpoises are gaffed, hauled aboard and left to die of shock and blood-loss. The animals can take 10-15 minutes to die. EIA investigations reveal that fishermen are harpooning mothers with nursing calves, leaving the calves to die.
- In the 1960's and 70's the average kill of Dall's porpoises was between 5-10,000 animals each year. However, in 1988, after Japan finally complied with the IWC ban on coastal minke whaling, the Dall's hunt rocketed to over 40,000 animals. In 1990, the IWC passed a resolution calling upon Japan to reduce the kill to no more than 5-10,000 animals per year. Japan's response was that the Dall's catch would be reduced provided coastal minke whaling was allowed to resume. Despite the concerns of IWC and Japanese scientists, and two further IWC resolutions, the Japanese Government has refused to stop the hunt. Other species hunted in Japanese waters are bottlenose dolphins, striped and Risso's dolphins, pilot whales and Baird's beaked whales.
- The IWC affords no protection for small cetaceans (dolphins and porpoises), which are under increasing threat from direct hunting, entanglement in fishing gears, over-fishing of prey species and pollution.

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