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RETURN FROM THE KILLING FIELDS: JAPAN'S 'SCIENTIFIC' WHALE HUNT SLAUGHTERS ALMOST EVERY WHALE IN SIGHT.

Japan's whaling fleet returns from its destructive whale hunt in the North Pacific

Japan's 'scientific' whaling fleet returned to port today laden with over 2,000 tonnes of whale meat following a three-month hunt that killed almost every whale in sight. The Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) today branded Japan's so-called 'scientific' whaling hunts 'widespread devastation' after revealing shocking new evidence of the scale of slaughter in the north Pacific.

EIA's analysis of figures released by Japan's Institute of Cetacean Research (ICR) yesterday show that the hunters killed up to 75% of the whales sighted over more than 10,000 nautical miles of ocean, despite Japan's frequent claim that its 'scientific' hunts are sustainable and will not damage the recovery of populations. Japan's offshore north Pacific hunt (JARPNII), conducted between 24th May and 16th August, killed 256 minke, sei, sperm and Bryde's whales.

Between 2002 and 2006, Japan's north Pacific hunters have reported sightings of just 635 minke whales during dedicated surveys covering vast tracts of open sea. Over this five-year period, Japan has 'lethally sampled' 80% of all animals observed. During the 2005 hunt season only 114 animals were sighted and 100 of these – almost 90% – were killed.

"The fact that Japan is killing almost every whale they see is simply unacceptable and clearly unsustainable' said Claire Bass, EIA Campaigner and member of the Scientific Committee to the International Whaling Commission (IWC).

The situation for sei whales is also of grave concern. One hundred of the 336 sei whales observed during the latest three month cruise were killed. The population abundance of north Pacific sei whales is not known, but they are listed as endangered by the IUCN (the World

Conservation Union).

The 2,000 tonnes of whalemeat from JARPNII will be added to Japan's ever-increasing stockpile of whalemeat – the bounties of so-called 'scientific research'. The decreasing demand for whale meat in Japan has forced the Japanese government to cut prices and look for new markets, such as schools, in order to offload the growing stockpiles of meat.

Bass continued, 'Japan is evidently happy to adopt a whaling regime that extinguishes every last whale in the ocean – despite a clear lack of demand for whale meat in Japan. Pro-conservation countries must immediately pursue diplomatic action at the highest level to stop Japan's 'scientific' whaling.'

Editors notes

- Japan hunts six of the twelve species of great whales protected by the 1986 moratorium on commercial whaling through a loophole that allows lethal takes for scientific research.
- Japan's lethal 'research' programmes are now entering their 20th year. To date Japan has reported killing 9,220 great whales in the name of science.
- In 1997 the Scientific Committee of the IWC found that none of the data collected by the lethal aspects of the programmes was required for the conservation or management of whale populations.
- The 'current' population estimate for minke whales in the north Pacific is anywhere between 12,800 and 25,000 animals. It was agreed by the IWC 15 years ago.
- The IUCN currently lists Bryde's whales as 'data deficient' and there is no agreed population abundance estimate for this species.
- From 2006 onwards Japan's 'scientific research' will involve the annual slaughter of 1,415 great whales, of which up to 1,035 will be taken in the Southern Ocean, and up to 380 in the North Pacific.
- Japan's hunt 'JARPAII' in the Southern Ocean whale sanctuary will commence in December 2006 and will include the killing of 50 fin

whales – the second largest mammal on earth and classified as 'endangered' by the IUCN, and 50 threatened humpback whales, whose charismatic jumps and tail displays make them the focus of a billion dollar worldwide whalewatching industry.

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Still photographs and video clips of scientific whale meat processing and products for sale in Japan are available on request.

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