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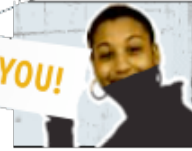
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## Japan's Whaling Fleet Sails Despite International Censure

**TOKYO, Japan**, November 20, 2007 (ENS) - Defying international pressure and a global whaling ban, the government of Japan launched its whaling fleet Sunday morning for an international whale sanctuary around Antarctica, where it intends to kill more than 1,000 whales over the next four months.

The fleet left its home port of Shimonoseki after a ceremony featuring family and friends of the crew holding smiling whale balloons and signs as a brass band played Popeye the Sailor Man.

Japan has announced that the fleet intends to kill 50 endangered fin whales, 50 threatened humpback whales and 935 minke whales this season.



A dead minke whale aboard a Japanese whaling vessel. (Photo courtesy [ICR](#))

The European Commission said today that it is "deeply concerned by Japan's plans to kill up to 1,000 minke,

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fin and humpback whales in a South Pacific whale hunt that will run until mid-April 2008."

The Commission emphasizes that there is no need to use lethal means to obtain scientific information about whales, and that adequate data for management purposes can be obtained using non-lethal techniques.

Japan's scientific whaling undermines international efforts to conserve and protect whales, the European Union's executive branch said, pointing out that the International Whaling Commission, IWC, has repeatedly adopted resolutions urging Japan to refrain from lethal scientific whaling.

But diplomatic pressure and world opinion is having no effect on the determination of the Japanese to hunt whales.

"The number of whales taken in Japan's research program is far below the potential biological removal (an estimate of the maximum number of animals that can be removed from a population – not including natural mortalities, while still allowing that stock to maintain its optimum sustainable value) for the species," according to the Institute of Cetacean Research in Tokyo, which carries out Japan's whale research program in the Antarctic and western North Pacific.



**Minoru Morimoto heads the Institute of Cetacean Research**  
 (Photo courtesy government of Japan)

"Japan's research makes a valuable contribution to the management of Antarctic whale species to ensure that any future commercial whaling regime is robust and sustainable to provide a reliable food source for generations to come," said the ICR Director General Minoru Morimoto.

Within the IWC, Japan is working to overturn the global moratorium that has been in place since 1986 and replace it with a managed regime of commercial whaling.

In opposition to this plan and the annual whale hunt, conservation groups are again planning to confront the Japanese fleet in the Southern Ocean.

"The whaling fleet must be recalled now," said Karli Thomas aboard the Greenpeace ship Esperanza off Shimonoseki on Sunday. "If it is not, we will take direct, non-violent action to stop the hunt."

But things went wrong for the Greenpeace ship on the first day of its mission. Instead of following the



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whaling fleet as it headed south, the Esperanza followed another unrelated ship and lost the trail. Still, Greenpeace is headed south to intercept the whalers.

The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society crew will depart from Melbourne, Australia the first week of December headed for the Southern Ocean to interfere with the whale hunt. Sea Shepherd is approximately seven days from the Antarctic Whale Sanctuary.

Sea Shepherd founder Captain Paul Watson assures the world that his crew will not be violent in its protest actions.

"Despite inflammatory statements to the contrary and misrepresentations from the public relations flaks for the outlaw Japanese whalers, the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society has no intention of ramming any Japanese whalers on the high seas," he said today.



**Sea Shepherd founder Captain Paul Watson** (Photo credit unknown)

"We have never rammed a Japanese whaler, we have never said we will ram a Japanese whaler and we have never implied that we will ram a Japanese whaler," said Watson. "Last year the Japanese rammed our ship twice. In 2006 we sideswiped the Japanese supply ship causing absolutely no damage. It is the Japanese that deploy ramming as a tactic."

"It amazes me that politicians get on their high horse to denounce Sea Shepherd everytime some P.R. whore for the Japanese whalers accuses us of eco-terrorism," fumed Watson. "The terrorists are the Japanese whalers. They are targeting highly endangered whales in a whale sanctuary in violation of a global moratorium on commercial whaling."

"This is the crime and the Japanese whalers are filling the sea with the hot blood of the whales as they cry crocodile tears over their tales of manufactured violence by whale defenders," he said.

"In 30 years of operations the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society has never caused a single injury and that is a record we intend to keep," Watson pledged.

Legal analyses by international panels of independent legal experts convened in Paris, Sydney, and London agree with Watson's long-held view that the Japanese whale hunt is a crime.

In a report issued November 14, they state that Japan's

expanding whaling is in violation of IWC regulations and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.

The International Fund for Animal Welfare, IFAW, which commissioned the legal review, says the time has come for decisive action to end Japan's expanding whaling program.

"Some of the world's top legal experts have made the case. Japan's whaling is not just cruel, it's criminal. It is time for the international community to act to end this illegal activity," said Patrick Ramage, IFAW's Whale Program manager.

Ambassador Alberto Szekely of Mexico, an international law professor who served as coordinator of the London Panel and related expert panels convened in Paris and Sydney last year said, "Japan's repeated assertion that its whaling activities are legal is incorrect and misleading. 'Scientific whaling' as conducted by Japan violates international law and should not be allowed to continue."



**Ambassador Alberto Szekely of Mexico**  
(Photo courtesy U. of New Mexico)

The London report finds Japan's current and proposed takings of humpback and sei whales as well as other whale species "are for primarily commercial purposes" and "plainly constitute international trade."

"Killing endangered whales for products that nobody needs is beneath the dignity of a great nation like Japan," said Ramage. "It's time for Japan to put away the harpoons and join the emerging global consensus for whale conservation in the 21st century."

Japan's self-allocated whaling quota for 2007-2008 includes more than 1,400 whales of seven different species - Antarctic minke, common minke, fin, sei, Brydes, sperm and humpback whales from the North Pacific and the waters of the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary around Antarctica, established by the International Whaling Commission in 1994.

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