

Background Paper for Japan's small-type coastal whaling¹

(Submitted by Japan)

Introduction

Since the imposition of the moratorium on commercial whaling in Japanese coastal waters twenty one years ago, the Government of Japan has repeatedly requested an interim relief allocation of minke whales in order to alleviate the hardships of small-type coastal whaling (STCW) communities; Abashiri², Ayukawa³, Wada⁴ and Taiji⁵ (see Fig.1). Furthermore, the Commission has adopted a number of resolutions (IWC-45-51(1993), 1995-3, 1996-1, 2000-1, 2001-6, and 2004-2) that:

- i) recognize the socio-economic and cultural needs of the four small-type coastal whaling communities;
- ii) recognize the severe impacts of the moratorium on the four communities;
- iii) agreed (and reaffirmed) its commitment to work expeditiously to alleviate their distress and;
- iv) noted the importance for communities to continue customary resource use practices on a sustainable basis.

However, Japan's requests have been continually rejected by the IWC. At past IWC meetings, members that had not supported Japan's STCW proposals cited the fact that a Revised Management Scheme (RMS) was not completed and/or that STCW was commercial whaling and the commercial whaling moratorium was in effect as reasons for their opposition.

RMS

Since the RMS process has been "postponed" indefinitely by the IWC, requesting the completion of the RMS before allowing a quota for STCW is substantially the same as penalizing the STCW communities for the dysfunctional situation of the IWC.

Commerciality

The argument of "commerciality" of the STCW is arbitrary and in a sense irrelevant since neither the Convention nor the Schedule uses or defines the term "commercial". Under the current aboriginal subsistence whaling regime, sales of whale products, including meat and crafts made from whale parts, are considered as acceptable by the IWC. Local consumption and some domestic transaction of whale meat in Japan, which is expected to take place in conjunction with the proposed resumption of the STCW, should be treated as the same.

Japan's Proposal

Japan proposes for the Commission to adopt the following sub-paragraph (f) to existing paragraph 10 of the Schedule.

(f) Notwithstanding the other provisions of paragraph 10, the taking of up to (***) minke whales from the Okhotsk Sea- West Pacific stock in the coastal waters east of Japan north of 35N and west of 150E (excluding the Okhotsk Sea) shall be permitted for each of the years 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 and the meat and products are to be used exclusively for local consumption.

The STCW will be conducted under the following conditions.

(a) Catch Quota

A catch quota is not specified in this proposal in order to indicate Japan's willingness to negotiate a catch quota with other members of the IWC. Further, Japan is prepared to reduce the number of minke whales taken as samples under the Special Permit catch in the north western Pacific in accordance with Article VIII of ICRW (JARPN II) by the same number of catch quota to be allowed for the STCW communities. Therefore, the total catch of minke whales and its impact on the stocks will remain the same irrespective of the number of whales to be caught by the STCW. The take of O stock animals and the possible take of a small number of J stock animals will have negligible impact on the stocks.

¹ When submitting this document, the Government of Japan noted that as it is unable to predict the course of discussions at IWC/60 in Santiago, it reserves its right to explain this document under the session on follow up to the intersessional meeting on the future of IWC on 19 and 20 June and during plenary agenda items 8 (Socio-economic implications and small-type whaling) and/or 18 (The IWC in the Future)

² located in northeastern Hokkaido on the Sea of Okhotsk, Abashiri city, Hokkaido Prefecture.

³ located on the Oshika Peninsula in northern Honshu on the Pacific Ocean, Ishinomaki city (former, Oshika-cho), Miyagi Prefecture.

⁴ located on the Bouso Peninsula in central Honshu on the Pacific Oceans, Wada, Minami-Bouso city (former Wada-cho), Chiba Prefecture.

⁵ located on the Kii Peninsula in central Honshu on the Pacific Ocean, Wakayama Prefecture.

(b) Monitoring, compliance and surveillance (MCS)

In order to ensure that whaling activities will be well managed, extensive MCS measures will be introduced. These measures will include;

- i) Acceptance of international observers at landing stations,
- ii) Deployment of VMS (vessel monitoring system) which will allow real time monitoring of whaling vessels, and
- iii) DNA registration of whale products which can identify individual whales.

These measures include most of the measures discussed during the RMS process.

Monitoring and control measures and an oversight committee described below will ensure that quotas are not exceeded and that all aspects of the whaling will be conducted in an open and transparent manner.

(c) Local Consumption

Adoption of this proposal will only allow community-based whaling in order to reinstate traditional and local practices associated with catching, processing, distribution and consumption of whale meat, and revitalize traditional festivals and rituals of the regions. The whaling to be permitted is a community-based local one. Vessels and persons to be involved are based in the traditional local whaling communities. Landing, processing, distribution and consumption under the community whaling will also be local.

The example schedule amendment provides that “the meat and products are to be used exclusively for local consumption”. This provision is identical with that of aboriginal subsistence whaling allowed by the IWC under paragraph 13 of the Schedule.

“Local consumption” under the current aboriginal subsistence whaling accommodates consumption within an entire country and even transport of whale meat across a national border. Japan strongly supports these forms of consumption. It is Japan’s view that limited domestic transaction expected to take place in conjunction with this proposal should also be viewed as “local consumption”. This view is also in line with the consensus agreement at IWC 56 that “The words ‘when the meat and products of such whales are to be used for local consumption’ means that some transactions beyond the aboriginal whaling communities under the current Schedule language are acceptable”.

(d) Oversight Committee

For the purpose of strengthening transparency, credibility, and accountability of the whaling activities Japan will accept an oversight committee open to representatives of IWC members that wish to join. This committee will review the operation of the STCW in order to secure its compliance with the conditions and measures to be adopted.

(e) Moratorium

While Japan maintains its position against the moratorium, it should be noted that the proposed additional paragraph to existing paragraph 10 does leave the moratorium on commercial whaling in place. We believe this arrangement is a practical compromise solution which would not harm the current positions of the IWC members.

The historical importance of whaling in Japan

Numerous publications have documented the history of whaling in Japan. In summary, the Japanese have been eating whale meat and utilizing whalebones, blubber and oil for more than two thousand years. Active hunting for large cetaceans has a history of more than 400 years. Offshore whaling activities began after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, however some whaling remained within the traditional areas where it still plays an important role as the basis of solidarity in the community. A detailed history of the STCW and present situation of small-type coastal whaling communities has been presented to the IWC on numerous occasions (see for example, Government of Japan 1997).

Japanese dietary habits which have been deeply rooted in history show that whale meat has been a protein source as ordinary everyday food but it also has been treated as a special food with regional and social significance. In the areas where whaling has been conducted traditionally, these dietary habits have become an integral part of the community such that all local ceremonies or festivities include the serving of some whale meat dishes.

The whales were thought to be brave and great “fish” for the Japanese in ancient times. Today, along with all other marine resources, whales continue to be viewed as a source of food to be used sustainably. The total

protection of all whales irrespective of their stock status as promoted by some members of the IWC as well as some environmental and animal right organizations is contradictory to Japanese cultural values where whale meat is still eaten and where whales are still revered through religious ceremonies and festivals. This is particularly the case for those communities where the local peoples life has depended on whaling activities.

Between 1986 and 1995, Japan submitted 37 academic anthropological and socio-economic papers written by international experts documenting the history, culture and traditions that are the essence of these small-type coastal whaling (Government of Japan, 1997). The whaling culture of Japan is comprised of many aspects including those related to whaling and processing techniques, kinship and specialized labour and distribution systems, methods of preparation/cooking and consumption, accompanying religious rituals, festivals and performing arts that have been developed over centuries.

Japanese Coastal Whaling Communities – the current situation

Four coastal communities, Abashiri; Ayukawa; Wadaura and Taiji (Fig.1) that were involved in the taking of minke whales prior to the imposition of the moratorium are highly dependent on whaling and still have socio-economic, cultural and dietary needs similar to aboriginal communities in the US, Russia and Greenland. These STCW communities in Japan now take Baird's beaked whales, pilot whales, and Risso's dolphins under the management of the Government of Japan and at a much reduced scale. The impact of the moratorium on commercial whaling in these communities has been enormous.

As reflected in the resolutions cited above, many countries expressed sympathy for the social, economic, and cultural difficulties of the STCW communities caused by the introduction of the moratorium on commercial whaling.

Conclusion

For Japan, discussions on the future of the IWC must address the need to permit the catching of minke whales from the Okhotsk Sea-West Pacific Stock which would allow community-based whaling in order to reinstate traditional and local practices associated with catching, processing, distribution and consumption of whale meat, and revitalize traditional festivals and rituals of the regions.

Japan is prepared to discuss any reasonable and practical proposal to address this matter together with details of MCS measures.

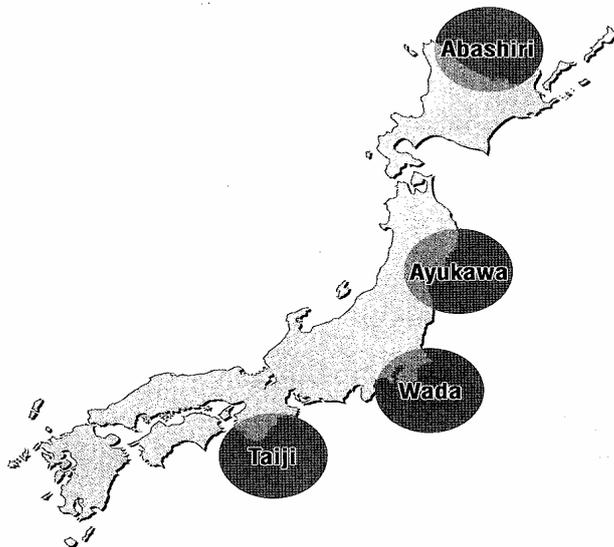


Fig1. Japanese Coastal Whaling Communities

REFERENCE

Government of Japan. 1997. Papers on Japanese Small-type Coastal Whaling Submitted by the Government of Japan to the International Whaling Commission 1986-1996.