

Anti-whaling Lobby Slanders Community Whaler's Traditional Human Needs

Japan Small-type Whaling Association

Words, words, words, but are they true?

Every year at the Annual Meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) one sees the anti-whaling and animal welfare/rights organizations handing out to delegates their brochures denouncing the rights of Japan's small-type coastal whalers (JSTCW). This anti-whaling propaganda material pretends to base its findings on original "field research". However, it is easy to immediately recognize that this material is merely biased propaganda, full of disinformation based on false statistics although they pretend to present social science arguments based on self-proclaimed "research" or "investigation".

In a typical example of such material, it has been alleged that "... a majority of the [Ayukawa] town's residents have no particular interest in the continuation or resumption of minke whaling" while by its own admission, the data they used "... has no basis in fact ...". They also admit that "Of course, it may be imprudent to try to judge the opinions of a town of 6,000 residents by talking to only 20 of them, and unreasonable to expect that the town's residents would reveal their true thoughts to an unknown traveler". (*AN INVESTIGATION OF SMALL TYPE COASTAL WHALING IN JAPAN – A Second Report on the Past, Present and Future of Ayukawa*)



Aerial view of Wada Town (courtesy: Wada Town)



Whaling vessel "Yasumaru No. 1" (courtesy: SHIMOMICHI Yoshiichi)

Indeed, the authors of this anti-whaling propaganda are not accredited social scientists but just casual travelers. Their minds were adamantly skewed against any whaling; their conclusions and arguments are based on whatever they want to believe without due respect to the facts of the communities. In their propaganda, verdicts are given arbitrarily denying the plight of the coastal whaling communities, based on self-proclaimed "research" made, often times, without actually visiting the communities.

The truth is that the commercial whaling moratorium imposed upon the JSTCW communities has had significant negative socio-economic, cultural, religious and dietary impacts. Such impacts, as well as the role of whaling in the communities, have been extensively studied and thoroughly documented by accredited international experts from many countries of the world. Well over 30 documents have been submitted by Japan to the IWC, offering full account of the serious economic dislocation and distortion to communal solidarities caused by the extended period of moratorium for minke whaling. These academic papers present credible facts of high academic value based on their field-work conducted using orthodox social science methodology.

WRONGS OF THE ANTI-WHALING ALLEGATIONS

Some of the typical allegations in the anti-whaling propaganda never cease to amaze us as they are arbitrarily based on the groundless self-righteous (“whalers, thou art evil”) approach which ignores the cultural rights stemming from the intrinsic characteristics of the whaling communities.

History:

ALLEGATION: The history of Japanese small-type coastal whaling communities is relatively new and should not be regarded as traditional or cultural.

TRUTH The history of the four JSTCW (Japanese Small-type Coastal Whaling) communities has a legitimate cultural background; it demonstrates the time-honored geographical and chronological continuity of whaling in Japan. These communities are the primary heirs of the Japanese whaling traditions. The following is the background account of ‘the Japanese Whaling Complex’, so named by accredited social scientists.

The history of Japanese whaling dates back to the Jomon period (10,000 – 300 B.C.). The ancient use of whales in Japan is evidenced by hand harpoons and porpoise skulls found in burial mounds.

Since the time immemorial, small-scale whaling and the utilization of stranded whales have been carried out in various parts of Japan. Much later than that in the history, large-scale and more systematically organized whaling developed. In the modern times in Japan until the time of the current moratorium, three categories of whaling existed; they were pelagic whaling, large-type coastal whaling (LTCW) and small-type coastal whaling (STCW).

Let us look at the cases of four community-based whaling localities along the Pacific coast of Japan. To the south east of

Kyoto, there is Taiji which is often identified as a place where large-scale organized whaling first started in the early 17th century. To the north-east of Tokyo, Wada is the modern beneficiary of the Baird’s beaked whaling culture. In the context of the tradition in the entire southern Boso Peninsula, whaling complex was established in the early 1600s. To the far north-east of Sendai, there is Ayukawa, one of the locations to which net whaling method was transferred in the early 18th century by the whalers pursuing the traditional net whaling method introduced to Taiji in 1675. This tradition has continued with adoption of modern technology in Ayukawa to this day. With regard to whaling in Abashiri, the northernmost port in Japan, there is the evidence that the Okhotsk culture utilised the whale resources in this area until the Okhotsk people was assimilated with the Ainu culture in the 11th century.

When anti-whaling propaganda alleges that whaling in the four STCW communities was created only in the 1900s, their argument reveals their oversight of historical findings. Their entire anti-whaling argument is based on flawed views of the Japanese whaling history.

On Socio-Economic Impacts of the Zero Catch limit:

ALLEGATION: The four communities are not experiencing distress caused by the commercial whaling moratorium.

TRUTH The effects of the moratorium have been comprehensively documented in more than 30 papers submitted to the IWC by the Government of Japan. These documents are written by accredited academic experts from countries such as U.S.A., Canada, Australia, Israel, Norway, and Japan. Further to the impact of the moratorium easily observed by lay persons on visits to the communities, these academic papers give in-depth accounts of the damage done to the communities and detail the truth of suffering experienced by the communities. Following are the most evident manifestations of the effects of the moratorium in Oshika Town, where the lives of people have been most seriously damaged by the ban on minke whaling.

< population >

The population shift of Oshika Township illustrates an example typical of the serious effects of the cessation of minke whaling. The population suffered a drastic decline following the imposition of the moratorium, from 7,814 in 1985, the year before implementation of the moratorium, to 5,891 in 1995, the year of the most recent National Census.

The notable decline of the population has led the town itself to the situation where the community has been deprived of its vitality and hopes for the future by the emigration of the younger generation to other geographical areas for alternative job opportunities. The ratio in the population of people older than age 65 climbed from 5.0% in 1995 to 27.8%, as shown in the table below. (All the figures are from the National Census survey).

Age range	Year 1955	Year 1995
0–14	38.5% (5,295)	14.4% (847)
15–64	56.5% (7,765)	57.8% (3,407)
65 and above	5.0% (693)	27.8% (1,637)

< Economy and employment >

Whaling and its related industries used to be the largest contributor to the town’s economy. In the heyday of thriving whaling, it used to employ as much as 85.3% of the town’s work-age population.

Now the financial output of whaling in the local economy and the percentage of those engaged in whaling and its related activities in the entire labor-oriented age group of the population have been much reduced by the continuation of the moratorium. However, this does not, in any way, mean that the role of whaling in the communal identity has lessened. Economic figures are not the only criteria by which the significance of whaling in local society is measured. Rather, it has to be evaluated comprehensively in socio-economic, cultural, religious and dietary terms. Small-type coastal whaling is so deeply rooted in the town’s cultural identity that the moratorium imposed upon it is eroding the foundation of the town’s integrity.

Even if the unemployed whalers found other jobs now, such jobs hardly substitute for what they proudly regard as the profession they were born for. In Japan, whalers used to be highly respected and they took pride in their occupation. Under the feudal regime through the Tokugawa period (17th to 19th century)

special status of importance was awarded to the whalers as they provided expert skills to the society. They were responsible for continuation of the tradition as they were heirs to the ancestors' professional skill. Losing this traditional pride and obliged to take other momentarily available jobs, they become distressed

with sense of failure and guilt. They feel their social status has been abruptly demoted. Such a shift in their standing is all the more intolerable because they know from their own experience, supported by the IWC's Scientific Committee experts, that the minke whale population in their waters is not endangered.

Tourism:

ALLEGATION: The four communities should give up whaling and adopt tourism as an alternative source of revenue; great potential lies ahead in tourism in these communities for the whale-watching industry. As a matter of fact, the number of tourists is increasing.

TRUTH Why should the community give up whaling and substitute it with something which has less spiritual value? What is the reason for doing so, when there are abundant whale resources in coastal waters right in front of them? Minke whaling before the moratorium was a sustainable fishery for many years, harvesting approximately 320 whales annually, and it will remain so when resumed.

Even for development of whale-related tourism, whaling has to be the major attraction and is an indispensable components of the attractions for those communities. It is very important that whaling is operational in the communities, so that the tourists can eat distinctively local whale cuisine on their visits there; tourism is not an alternative to whaling. Rather, it could be a complementary part of the communities' prosperity with whaling as its mainstay.

In order to vitalize the depressed economy caused by the moratorium, the communities are still struggling to improve their infrastructure seeking to promote tourism. This has brought about some limited success; however, given the remoteness and difficult access, they are disadvantaged in competition with other localities that cater to tourists.

In Ayukawa, the township of Oshika financed to build a modern 'Whale Land' to attract tourists. The revenue it has accrued since its opening in October 1990 has been so small that municipal taxes from the residents have been required to subsidise its operation.

Above all, what can be a main tourist attraction without minke whaling in these less accessible coastal communities?

Commercialism:

ALLEGATION: Japanese small-type coastal whaling is commercial whaling per se. It is nothing more and nothing less.

TRUTH There is nothing inherently so evil about the commercial aspects of JSTCW. More important, however, is the fact that it has subsistence aspects which make it distinct from pelagic whaling and large-type coastal whaling. The Japanese Government, supported by anthropological research findings, has been arguing at the IWC over the past ten years that JSTCW has similar characteristics as those found in aboriginal/subsistence whaling carried out in other countries and approved by the IWC. In consideration of both types of whaling, anti-whaling propaganda deliberately dismiss the fact that latter type of whaling contains some commercial component. JSTCW should be awarded special considerations by the Commission as a distinct category of whaling.

The IWC itself recognized in its Resolution adopted at its 45th Annual Meeting in Kyoto, "the socio-economic and cultural needs of the four small coastal whaling communities in Japan and the distress to these communities which has resulted from the cessation of minke whaling" and resolved to "work expeditiously to alleviate the distress to these communities which has resulted from the cessation of minke whaling" (Resolution:IWC/45/51).

In order to alleviate the distress in the communities, while waiting for either the creation of a separate category of whaling or the lifting of the commercial whaling moratorium, Japan has requested that the IWC adopt interim measures to provide a small quota. However, on the basis of the commercial aspect of JSTCW, (which is similar to these commercial components in some of the approved aboriginal/subsistence whaling) the IWC has repeatedly refused to allow a very modest request for an interim allocation of 50 minke whales to JSTCW. The modesty of this request is evident in the fact that over many years more than 300 minke whales were annually harvested in a sustainable manner until the moratorium was imposed. The IWC Scientific Committee also agreed that it is safe to take 50 animals annually out of the North Pacific minke whale stock with the population of at least 25,000 animals.

In its effort of compromise to make the request for an interim relief allocation of 50 minke whales more acceptable to the anti-whaling members of the Commission, Japan agreed to the removal of commercial aspects from the JSTCW. This "community-based whaling" (CBW) was to be conceived as a type of whaling that shares the same characteristics with aboriginal/subsistence whaling since it contains a minimum level of commerciality. This exercise was not an easy task, since there was no IWC definition of "commercial" or "commercial aspects". The Action Plan to control whale meat distribution and eliminate the commercial aspects for the CBW was proposed as a result of sincere compromise by Japan to address the concerns of the anti-whaling members of the IWC.

The Action Plan has been drafted at a price of significant economic loss; it has been made for the sake of restoration of the health and cultural needs of the communities; if adopted, the Action Plan will;

1) ensure that distribution of whale products from the interim relief allocation is restricted to within the area of the four CBW communities;

2) ensure that no profit be made from the taking of the minke whales; only the costs actually incurred by the whalers would be reimbursed; and

3) ensure the distribution though a non-commercial distribution channel stringently controlled by a Management Council to be established in each CBW community. This will involve a complete negation of the commercial distribution channels that have, to this point, existed for JSTCW.

In order to accommodate the numerous demands of the anti-whaling members of the Commission, the Action Plan was revised several times until the Commission finally recognized the revised Action Plan (IWC/47/46) as embracing "constructive management elements in accordance with IWC regulations" at the 47th IWC Annual Meeting (IWC Resolution 1995-3). However, the Action Plan is yet to be adopted by the IWC.

TRUTH about the Japanese Small-Type Coastal Whaling and its standing

- (1) The JSTCW has a long tradition of sustainable whaling. It has neither caused nor will cause any adverse effects to the status of the North Pacific minke resources. There is nothing wrong with utilising abundant resources in a sustainable manner. **Sustainable use** is an internationally accepted principle of conservation.
- (2) For management of local marine resources, **multi-species management** is a responsible course to take: protection of arbitrarily selected species, such as minke whales in this case, leads to a distortion of the local marine ecosystem as a whole.
- (3) The **human rights** of the local residents have been abused by the extended period of the minke whaling moratorium which prohibits them from the use of available and non-endangered local resource.
- (4) Japan's Small-type Coastal Whaling (JSTCW) is socially, economically and culturally distinguishable from industrialized commercial whaling. It is an **indispensable and integral part of communal identity and well-being**.

Conclusion

No more delays should be tolerated to resolve the distress of the JSTCW communities. The anti-whaling members of IWC should immediately allow JSTCW to resume coastal minke whaling! If the IWC does not wish to further lose its credibility, it is time NOW to take action!!



Historical site at Tomyo-zaki (a lookout for whaling)
(courtesy: KAINO Yoshitsugu)



Aerial view of Oshika Town
(courtesy: Oshika Town)

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