

A DECADE OF DISAPPOINTMENT



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

Japan and Small-type Coastal Whaling at the IWC: People Matter Too!

A Decade of Disappointment

The whaling vessel sits beached. Although she holds one of the nine currently valid licenses and has been maintained, ready to go, she has not gone minke whaling since 1988.

For her owner, and for the holders of three other whaling licenses, the unused whaling vessels are very expensive symbols. They represent their owners' hopes and their owners' persistence to resume whaling. They also represent the owners' responsibilities to those who have depended on the vessels, and on them, for their living, both directly and in their communities. They want very much to resume operating these vessels, but because they cannot take minke whales, to operate them would cost more than they can possibly afford.

The owner of this vessel and so many, many others in Japan's four small-type coastal whaling communities have tried, in good faith, for a decade now, to work with the International Whaling Commission. They have sought to ease the tremendous burden the IWC's commercial whaling moratorium has placed on Japan's small-type coastal whalers, and on their communities, by working with IWC towards an interim relief allocation.

But to no avail. For the Japanese, it has indeed been a decade of disappointment.

The moratorium took effect at the end of 1987. The decision which instituted the interruption in commercial whaling was supposed to allow the IWC Scientific Committee to undertake comprehensive stock assessments and to design a method of establishing safe and sustainable catch quotas. The Commission was supposed to implement it by 1990 at the latest. The IWC Scientific Committee did complete its work, but the Commission continues to delay its implementation.

The whalers knew before the ban took effect that losing their minke whale catches would seriously threaten their capabilities to keep their small-scale operations viable because now they would be entirely dependent upon very low quotas of small cetaceans which are not under IWC management. To maintain their operations, they did several things. They paired eight of their nine vessels and laid off crew. They chose one vessel from each pair to go whaling.

Some whale-boat owners tried to diversify into tuna fishing or salmon farming, for example. Crew tried different forms of inshore fishing or diving for abalone. Most of these endeavours were unsuccessful and some even lost money because people were trying to do things they were not familiar with.

Throughout all of this, the Government of Japan has, each year, continued to request an interim relief allocation of 50 minke whales to reduce the negative impacts of the seemingly-endless moratorium on the whaling communities. But all they have taken home is three resolutions (in 1993, 1995, and 1996), delaying tactics to accompany the refusals.

The 49th IWC meeting in Monaco was the tenth refusal of Japan's modest request for an interim relief allocation to alleviate the distress the moratorium has caused to the small-type whaling communities. What made this refusal especially hard to accept was that the IWC did authorise a small quota to a group of Americans which had not whaled for 70 years. While Japanese small-type coastal whalers were pleased that the IWC had recognised another coastal whaling community, it also further frustrated them that their case based on cultural, socio-economic and dietary needs was treated so differently.

So, Japanese whaling communities and the people who live in them are increasingly at risk.

People and their Communities at Risk

The whalers' and their communities' attempts at diversification (working as joint operations tuna fishing; salmon farming; and tourism, for example) have not compensated for the deprivation of minke whaling. These efforts have been at best, unevenly successful and certainly not compensatory. Some whalers have found other jobs, but these do not match the rewards of whaling economically, socially, or spiritually.

Impacts of the Minke Whaling Moratorium on Whalers and their Families

The moratorium has hurt whalers and their families at several levels. Whalers see their work firstly as a profession, secondly as a livelihood, and thirdly as a traditional occupation which they have inherited from their ancestors and learned from their elders and which they have the obligation-and the desire-to teach to the next generation.

Thus, with the continuation of the moratorium, the whalers, and their families, have been deprived not only of their incomes, but also of their identities as community members. That this has come as a result of the arbitrary "criminalisation" of their traditionally honourable

sorts of problems because of the self-respect and community regard which historically had been the whalers' birthrights.

Nor have social problems been the only ones whaling communities have faced as a result of the moratorium. With the dramatic drop in incomes resulting from the prohibition of small-type coastal minke whaling, Fishery Cooperative Associations in the whaling communities have been seriously hurt. So have the communities' secondary and tertiary businesses, for in a whaling town, no business survives if there is not whaling in the first place.

Further, because whalers had, before the moratorium, made disproportionately larger contributions to community tax revenues, the towns were doubly hit: families' incomes and town government tax losses. This problem, especially in Ayukawa, threatened community viability at a time when community revenues were also declining from decreased fishing revenues.

Some of the whalers have found less satisfactory work. But for the communities, losing the social and cultural framework whaling had traditionally provided—catching, processing, distributing, eating, sharing, and celebrating whales—is the greatest loss. Tragic, poignant and unnecessary.



Part of a picture scroll illustrating whaling in the Edo period (1603–1867) in Japan (courtesy: Shoko Museum of Arts)

profession by outsiders, makes their deprivation that much more tragic.

Practically, this has meant an increase in stress-related health problems for the whalers. It has also caused emotional stress between both husbands and wives and between parents and children.

In addition to their daily living concerns, for example, children have had to deal with financial worries regarding their families' abilities to pay for their continuing education. For many, this comes at times when, in order to succeed in the universally important Japanese high school and university entrance examinations, they should be concentrating only on their studies.

Impacts of the Minke Whaling Moratorium of Whaling Communities

Obviously, these family stresses have also been reflected in community social problems. Until the moratorium, the whaling towns had been free of these

Japanese Concerns about Attacks on Japanese Culture

The Japanese whalers know, as scientists also know, North Pacific minke stocks are not declining. Why, then, has the reasonable and well-documented case (based on culture, socio-economic factors and diet) for an interim relief allocation been rejected by the IWC for ten years?! Japan has diligently, honestly, and clearly addressed, in a comprehensive way, all of the objections to STCW which IWC Members have raised. This has included studies by social scientists and a willingness of the communities to drastically reduce the commercial elements of whaling operations. Yet the denial of coastal whaling as an integral part of Japan's history and its culture continues.

This decade-long denial by the IWC of cultural, socio-economic and dietary needs of small-type whaling communities in Japan, using arguments which are neither scientifically credible nor culturally responsible, is an injustice.



(courtesy: Shoko Museum of Arts)

Nations that adamantly reject request by Japanese STCW in the IWC seem to be obsessed with a notion arising from their own past whaling practice in which they threw away whale meat in order to gain yield of oil out of the whales they hunted around the world. This notion underlies their rejection, even though STCW operates in contrast with other types of whaling; STCW utilises all possible whale parts with minimum waste. These opponents close their eyes to the cultural significance of STCW as basis of communal unity.

Japan's Decade of Good Faith STCW Efforts at IWC

It is difficult to comprehend that Japan's IWC opponents can still claim incomplete understanding of the importance of STCW to Japan and its whaling communities. In the past decade, Japan has submitted more than 40 papers on this subject. It has responded—frequently more than once—to questions, reservations, and alleged misunderstandings about the science and the socio-economics of Japanese STCW and the justifications for an interim relief allocation (IRA), pending the resumption of commercial whaling.

Evolution of Japan's IRA Requests

Japan first requested an IRA in 1988. Since 1990, Japan has specifically asked for 50 North Pacific minke whales. But without success.

Some delegations allege that their opposition is based on the commercial elements of Japanese STCW. They argue that to grant the IRA would mean de facto resumption of commercial whaling. Japan has sought to address these arguments and other arguments at IWC meetings and elsewhere, year after year after year.

Japan has offered to reorganise JSTCW into community-based whaling (CBW) until commercial minke whaling resumes, despite the economic losses the whalers would bear by doing so. Under this CBW Action Plan, whale products could be distributed and consumed in the least commercial ways.

Japan first made this CBW offer in 1993. To have done so reflected the Japanese coastal whaling communities' fundamental need to resume minke whaling for non-economic reasons, even though money has been an integral part of their whaling culture since coastal whaling began.

But in 1997, after five years of Japanese offers and revisions of the CBW Action Plan, the IWC opponents still rejected Japan's request.

The "Commercial" Debate

Given that there are clearly commercial elements of the whaling operations of other groups allowed to continue whaling, the argument about commercialism in Japanese STCW is not a legitimate objection. Why have the "commercial" aspects of Japan's small-type coastal whaling been an issue? Alaskan whalers buy equipment to go whaling and sell handicrafts made from whales they take and Japan's STCW is no more commercial than the approved Greenland Inuit whaling operations. After all, they sell whale products at local supermarkets. In addition, the well-documented cultural need of Japan's whaling communities to resume whal-



Memorial Service for Whales in Taiji (courtesy: Taiji Town)

ing is no less than that of a group of American natives who have not been whaling for 70 years but were given a quota at the 1997 meeting.

Certainly, neither the debate about the commercial elements of Japan's STCW nor the earlier "concern" opponents expressed regarding the "morality and ethics" of Japan's STCW have much to do with IWC Members' treaty responsibilities to manage whale resources. Rather, they represent, for the Japanese, a frustrating decade of irresponsible political games, hypocrisy and the application of double standards which has caused severe hardships to Japan's STCW communities and resulted in a further erosion of the IWC's credibility as a responsible resource management organisation.

And Now?

Resolution, Resolution, Resolution: No Action

To answer questions and respond to objections to its request for a 50-minke whale interim relief allocation, the Government of Japan has provided more than 40 papers addressing issues of socio-economics, anthropology, science, and law. It has, in good faith, sought IWC Members' understanding of these complex issues by providing responsible documentation of all aspects of community-based whaling. Although the IWC has adopted three Resolutions, people in Japan's whaling communities cannot eat Resolutions, nor can they use Resolutions to pay their bills, and certainly Resolutions make no gifts for traditional community celebration.

It is now 1998. Five years ago, in 1993—five years after the GOJ and the communities had sought to address every point of objections raised—the Commission graciously resolved “...to work expeditiously to alleviate the distress to these communities...” There were just a few questions, Japan was told, about the “commercial” aspects of the Action Plan. Japan answered these questions in 1994. And in 1995. All that these efforts gave the whaling communities was another Resolution. This one “[r]ecognise[d] the revised Action Plan as constructive management elements in accordance with IWC regulations.” Still, the people in Japan's STCW communities couldn't eat it, or pay bills with it, and certainly not celebrate with it.

Then, in 1996, after Japan had tried yet again, with yet more information, it got, in return, yet another Resolution—this one calling for yet another workshop to “...review and identify commercial aspects and socio-economic and cultural needs...” Again!?

Clearly, the response of the Commission to these Resolutions has been lacking good faith. The Commission has not “work[ed] expeditiously to alleviate the distress to these communities” and has not seriously considered the socio-economic and cultural needs of the people in Japan's STCW communities.

ICRW: Protect and Delay or Conserve and Utilise?

Japan and a minority of other IWC Members have stressed that the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW) is about conserving and using whales, not about only protecting them. The Convention is also about using science as the basis for management. The so-called morality and ethics of whaling has nothing to do with science; it is another delaying tactic.

But even if it were a legitimate concern, there is a standard and widely-agreed-upon ethical principle governing the use of living resources. Adopted by almost all members of the United Nations, it declares resource use is justified, provided it is sustainable and does not damage biological diversity, and that such resource use should be encouraged if it promotes social and economic benefit.

Both the 1980 World Conservation Strategy and the 1992 United Nations Earth Summit's Agenda 21 recognise the social and environmental benefits of sustainable resource use and urge implementation of this



Aerial view of Oshika Town (courtesy: Oshika Town)

principle as a responsible and desirable courses of action.

Japan is Committed to Restoring Small-type Coastal Whaling

Five years ago, at the IWC meeting in Kyoto, the chairman of the Japan Small-type Whaling Association said,

...Our lives [in Japan's small-type whaling communities] are culturally simpler and economically simpler than the lives of those in Japan's cities. But we too are part of the history and the modern life of Japan.... We in simpler communities also have responsibilities. We provide food for the people who share our lives. In this way we make our contribution to society. And we are proud that we make this contribution.

It is also our responsibility, our duty, and our wish to pass on to the next generation this way of living and of contributing. Those who have nothing to do with our way of life in local communities have no right to try to deny us this responsibility.

For the whalers and their communities this is how it is. Their very great efforts to resume their traditional community way of life continues. And will continue.

To the IWC, they say it is time to stop unfairness and double standard toward Japan's community-based whalers. Honour your treaty commitments and obligations. Japan and Japanese community-based whalers have co-operated with the IWC. If the IWC continues to ignore our cultural, socio-economic and dietary needs, Japan will be forced to take unilateral action to defend and maintain its whaling communities and their people.

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