



New Japanese Government urged to ban poisonous whale and dolphin products

Press Release: 24th November 2009

A worldwide alliance of environmental and consumer organisations today called on the Japan's new government to take urgent action to stop the hunt of toothed cetaceans and ban the sale of contaminated whale, dolphin and porpoise products for human consumption in Japan.

Japan sets quotas for around 20,000 toothed cetaceans (dolphins, porpoises and toothed whales) to be caught in Japanese coastal waters each year, with the products sold across Japan. Feeding at the top of the ocean food chain, these animals are highly contaminated with mercury, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and other toxic substances.

The highly acclaimed documentary 'The Cove' has recently put the spotlight on Japan's controversial dolphin hunts in Taiji with unprecedented Japanese media coverage. However, most reports have failed to mention the levels of mercury typically found in dolphin and other toothed cetacean products. For decades scientists have found alarmingly high levels of mercury and other pollutants in cetacean products on sale in Japan. Concentrations in some samples have exceeded Japan's own safety limit for mercury by up to 5,000 times, putting consumers at serious risk.

Clare Perry of the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) said: "*People in Japan are not aware that around 15,000 dolphins, porpoises and small whales are killed in Japan's coastal waters each year for food products. Some of these animals are so polluted that experts have suggested that just one small meal could cause acute mercury poisoning. Legislation to stop the hunts and ban the sale of contaminated cetacean products is urgently required.*"

Long-term exposure to mercury is known to cause neurological disorders (with impacts on reaction time, attention span, language and memory), an increased risk of Parkinson's disease, arteriosclerosis, immune subsystem suppression, and hypertension. Threats to children include autism, Asperger's Syndrome and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) – despite this, toothed cetacean products are still distributed to some schools in Japan as part of the obligatory school lunch programme.

Sakae Hemmi of the Japan based NGO Elsa Nature Conservancy said: "*Our latest research indicates that 90% of people are not sufficiently informed about the high levels of toxic substances in dolphin*

products. Until legislation exists to ban the sale of contaminated cetacean products, retailers need to put warning labels on all whale, dolphin and porpoise products.”

Japan's *National Institute for Minamata Disease* (NIMD), an offshoot of the Environment Ministry, has recently collected more than 1000 hair samples from citizens of Taiji to analyse the mercury content, with initial results indicating significantly higher levels than the national average. Leading Japanese magazine AERA commented that the examination failed to include standard established tests for Minamata disease and questioned the ability of the Environment Ministry to carry out an independent study.

An open letter from the alliance of organisations, which includes more than ten Japanese consumer and food safety groups, calls on Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama and his Minister of Fisheries to refrain from setting any future catch quotas for toothed cetaceans. The letter further calls on the Ministry of Health to prohibit the sale of polluted cetacean products and the newly established Consumers Affairs Agency to expedite the necessary action and legislation.

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Editors Notes

Evidence of the contamination of toothed whale, dolphin and porpoise products in Japan is widely available, including the following publications:

Endo, T., Hotta, Y., Haraguchi, K., and Sakata, M. 2003. Mercury Contamination in the Red Meat of Whales and Dolphins Marketed for Human Consumption in Japan. *Environ. Sci. Technol.*, **2003**, 37 (12), pp 2681–2685. Available at <http://pubs.acs.org/doi/abs/10.1021/es034055n>

Poisonous Policies – Japan's failure to stop the sale of polluted whale, dolphin and porpoise products. Available in Japanese and English at <http://www.eia-international.org/campaigns/species/cetaceans/reports/>

Toxic Menu – Contamination of whale meat and impact on consumers' health. Available at [www.prowildlife.de/sites/default/files/toxic menu_lowres.pdf](http://www.prowildlife.de/sites/default/files/toxic%20menu_lowres.pdf)

Mercury Contamination is Threatening Our Dining Table –An Investigative Report. Available in English and Japanese, www.elsaenc.net/

Link to AERA magazine article (subscription) - <http://www.aera-net.jp/latest/backdetail.html?id=111>

Link to open letter (English) – <http://www.eia-international.org/files/reports187-1.pdf>

Link to the open letter (Japanese) - <http://www.eia-international.org/files/reports188-1.pdf>

The organisations supporting this call are listed below:

Advocates for Animals, UK
All Life in a Viable Environment (地球生物会議), Japan
Animal Welfare Institute, USA
Blue Voice.org, USA
Campaign Whale, UK
Campaigns Against the Cruelty to Animals (CATCA), Canada
Canadian Marine Environment Protection Society, Canada,
Cetacean Society International, USA
Cocoon(コクーン), Japan
Consumers Union of Japan(日本消費者連盟), Japan
Dolphin Connection, USA
Dyrenes Venner, Denmark
Earth Island Institute's International Marine Mammal Project, USA
Eastern Caribbean Coalition for Environmental Awareness (ECCEA)
Elsa Nature Conservancy (エルザ自然保護の会), Japan
Fundacion Cethus, Argentina
Happy Tail (ハッピーテイル), Japan
Harmonics Life Center (ハーモニクスライフセンター), Japan
Humane Society International
Institute of Biodiversity in Japan (いきもの多様性研究所), Japan
In Defense of Animals (IDA), USA
International Fund for Animal Welfare
LegaSeaS International, USA
Lokahi (ロカヒ), Japan
Lunta no Niwa (るんたのにわ), Japan
Marine Connection, UK
MEER. e.v., Germany
National Council of SPCAs (NSPCA), South Africa
OceanCare, Switzerland
Oceanic Preservation Society (OPS), USA
Orca Network, USA
Pacific Whale Foundation, Hawaii, USA
PangeaSeed (パンゲアシード), Japan
Pro Wildlife, Germany
Project Jonah, New Zealand
Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA)
Save Japans Dolphins Coalition
Society for the Conservation of Marine Mammals (GSM), Germany
Society for the Conservation of Marine Mammals, Denmark
Tethys Research Institute, Italy
The Whaleman Foundation, USA
Tulsi, Dog & Vege-restaurant (トゥルシー), Japan
NPO Uzu (うず), Japan
Warabe Mura (わらべ村), Japan
Whale & Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCCS), UK
World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA), UK

Keisuke Amagasa(天笠啓祐): NO! GMO

Campaign(遺伝子組み換え食品いらない! キャンペーン), Japan

Harukichi Onoduka(小野塚春吉): The Japan Scientists' Association(日本科学者会議), Japan

Shoei Go: NPO Minga Village(みんなが村), Shiga, Japan

Satish Kumar(サティッシュ・クマール): chief editor of "Resurgence,"

Japan(シューマッハー・カレッジ創設者・エコロジー&スピリチュアル雑誌「リサージェンス」編集長)