

Dead-end whaling problem: Resuming coastal commercial whaling should be expedited instead of adhering to fruitless claims

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In 2014, Japan's Antarctic research whaling was "defeated"¹ by the International Court of Justice, but the Japanese government resumed research whaling by reducing the number of whaling catches². However, as will be detailed later, the Japanese government's objective is to resume commercial whaling in the Antarctic, not to maintain research whaling. No prospects for resuming commercial whaling in the Antarctic have been given. Cetaceans are divided into large cetaceans, including minke whales, and small cetaceans, including dolphins. The International Whaling Commission (IWC) regulates commercial whaling of large cetaceans. As for coastal whaling within Japan's exclusive economic zone, only small cetaceans are currently commercially used. In May 2015, the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums considered expulsion from the Japanese association on the grounds that Japanese aquariums were using dolphins caught live in the Taiji dolphin drive hunt. After a vote, the Japanese association decided not to use Taiji dolphins, and some aquariums were considering leaving the association. Furthermore, in November 2015, the application for registration as a global geopark was rejected on the grounds that the Izu Peninsula had been driving dolphins³.



Figure: A whaling ship (left) and an anti-whaling organization's protest ship (right) in

* <https://webronza.asahi.com/science/articles/2016061000005.html>

Iceland, a whaling country (June 2006, courtesy of Matsuda). Between them was my whale sightseeing boat. Whaling is not limited to Japan.

Japan's largest fishery company used to hunt commercial whales in the Antarctic, but has long since stopped doing so. On the other hand, coastal whaling such as beaked whales is still commercially practiced in Japan⁴. There are other countries besides Japan that continue to hunt whaling, such as Iceland and Norway. Indigenous peoples, such as those in the United States and Russia, are allowed indigenous traditional subsistence whaling.⁵

I personally believe that sustainable commercial whaling is possible and should be resumed. I think the reason why Japan can't reopen is also a problem with Japan's international sense.

In conclusion first, the top priority should now be to resume coastal whaling of large cetaceans. Otherwise, Japan's commercial whaling itself will be lost.

Blue whales, which used to be hunted about 30,000 a year⁶, fell to the brink of extinction, and fishing was banned by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) in 1964. Although the number is gradually recovering, it is believed that there are still only a few thousand blue whales left. In 1982 a moratorium on all commercial whaling was agreed. In 1992, the IWC's Scientific Subcommittee (SC) completed a method of managed whaling that can be implemented with consideration of uncertainties, called the "Revised Management Procedure" (RMP).⁷ However, due to ongoing disputes over the monitoring system, commercial whaling has yet to resume.

Member nations have the right to withhold decisions of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling. Norway and Iceland, which withdrew from the IWC for a time, continue commercial whaling with reservations. In contrast, Japan is still proceeding with research whaling, which is permitted under the Convention.

In April 2002, WWF-J (World Wide Fund for Nature Japan) issued a dialogue declaration titled "Time to take a new step forward" in their bulletin⁸. It was agreed at the IWC/SC that the black minke whale and other species were not (quasi-)endangered and that a quota could be secured for their take on a precautionary basis. Discussions with my ecologist friends from overseas led to distrust of the Japanese government, which I feared would again condone overfishing if the program was reopened. I thought it would be better, then, if a credible environmental organization participated in the management, and WWF-J, undaunted by the slander of the international community,

responded.

Unfortunately, the Japanese government has not used the WWF-J trump card to this day. It is believed that their strategy before losing their case in the international court was to increase the number of whaling catches and target species of research whaling in order to obtain a compromise. In fact, in 2010 Chile proposed a compromise that would allow the resumption of coastal commercial whaling of large cetaceans in exchange for halving research whaling in the Antarctic. In that sense, increasing the quota for research whaling can be said to have been a strategy for resuming commercial whaling. However, not only anti-whaling countries but also Japanese government officials opposed it⁹. This situation has changed with the aforementioned international judgment. To begin with, research whaling in the Southern Hemisphere and coastal whaling in Japan use different resources. To use it as a compromise bargaining chip would mean that no one is concerned about the stock status of coastal whaling itself.

The global geopark issue on the Izu Peninsula is also regrettable. The 2015 review was conducted by the Global Geoparks Network just before the Global Geoparks became an official project of UNESCO. They have stopped driving dolphins on the Izu Peninsula, but have asked if they plan to resume them in the future. He replied that the Izu Peninsula would not set a precedent for its inscription by promising not to drive dolphins when it becomes a Global Geopark, but rather that it would be UNESCO's role to pass on cultural diversity. I think this attitude was admirable.

Thus, the position of whaling in the international community is weak. There may be other cases where a certain assertion is accepted as international common sense, regardless of the issues in which you are not involved. On the contrary, resuming coastal whaling alone may increase opportunities to change the world.

¹<http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000035016.pdf>

²<http://www.jfa.maff.go.jp/j/press/enyou/151130.html>

³http://izugeopark.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/045_20151222_unesco_question.pdf

⁴http://www.maff.go.jp/j/pr/aff/1209/spe1_02.html

⁵http://www.jfa.maff.go.jp/j/whale/w_thinking/#5

⁶http://kokushi.fra.go.jp/H27/H27_53S.pdf

⁷<http://www.whaling.jp/qa.html>

⁸<http://www.wwf.or.jp/activities/2005/05/639501.html>

⁹<http://www.jfa.maff.go.jp/j/study/enyou/pdf/gizigaiyo3.pdf>