

Statement from the Ocean Committee, KFEM (21st Jun 2010)

**Whale products smuggled from Taiji, Japan, the town in “The Cove”,
being sold in the middle of Seoul!
Confirmed by Seoul Metropolitan Police investigation!
Japanese scientific whaling revealed its ugly face!**



(Photo; Seoul Metropolitan Police confirmed that whale products purchased in Taiji and smuggled have been sold in Japanese restaurant in Seoul. Police investigation found that the whale products came from whales killed by Japanese scientific whaling.)

On 14th Apr, the Ocean Committee of KFEM made an allegation that whale products have been smuggled from Japan and sold in a Japanese restaurant in Seoul. It turned out to be true after the police investigation. Interestingly, the whale products are found to come from a whale meat specialty distributor in Taiji. Taiji is a small village in Wakayama prefecture where the Oscar winner for best feature documentary “The Cove” depicted its slaughter of thousands of dolphins.

Seoul Metropolitan Police sent whale products confiscated from Kim, the owner of the Japanese restaurant, Cetacean Research Institute, part of the National Fisheries Research & Development Institute. The DNA test revealed Kim’s whale products are from four different species and seven individual Antarctic Minke whales. The police said that Kim admitted the allegation of Ocean

Committee to be true and that smuggling whale products is against not only CITES but also national laws such as Wild Animal and Plant Protection Act and Customs Law. Problems pointed out by the police are as follows. 1) Japan selling whale products to foreigners when international trade of whale products are prohibited. 2) Kim smuggling whale products himself. 3) Kim having purchased vacuum packed products for long term storage. 4) Kim making bad use of a weak custom inspection for endangered wildlife. The police is set to expand the range of investigation, expressing suspicion that there might be more smuggling or illegal whaling operation.

The Ocean Committee had DNA tests of 13 samples of whale products collected at a couple of field investigation with Louie Psihoyos, the director of "The Cove", and an American scientist. Genetic identification revealed 12 samples out of 13 were protected from international trade by CITES. It also revealed that Antarctic Minke whales and sei whales were highly likely to come from, a fin whale is from, and NP Minke whales and a Risso's dolphin are likely to be from Japan. These results are published on Biology Letters this April. Earlier, the makers of "The Cove" helped break up whale meat smuggling operation in a Japanese restaurant in the US.

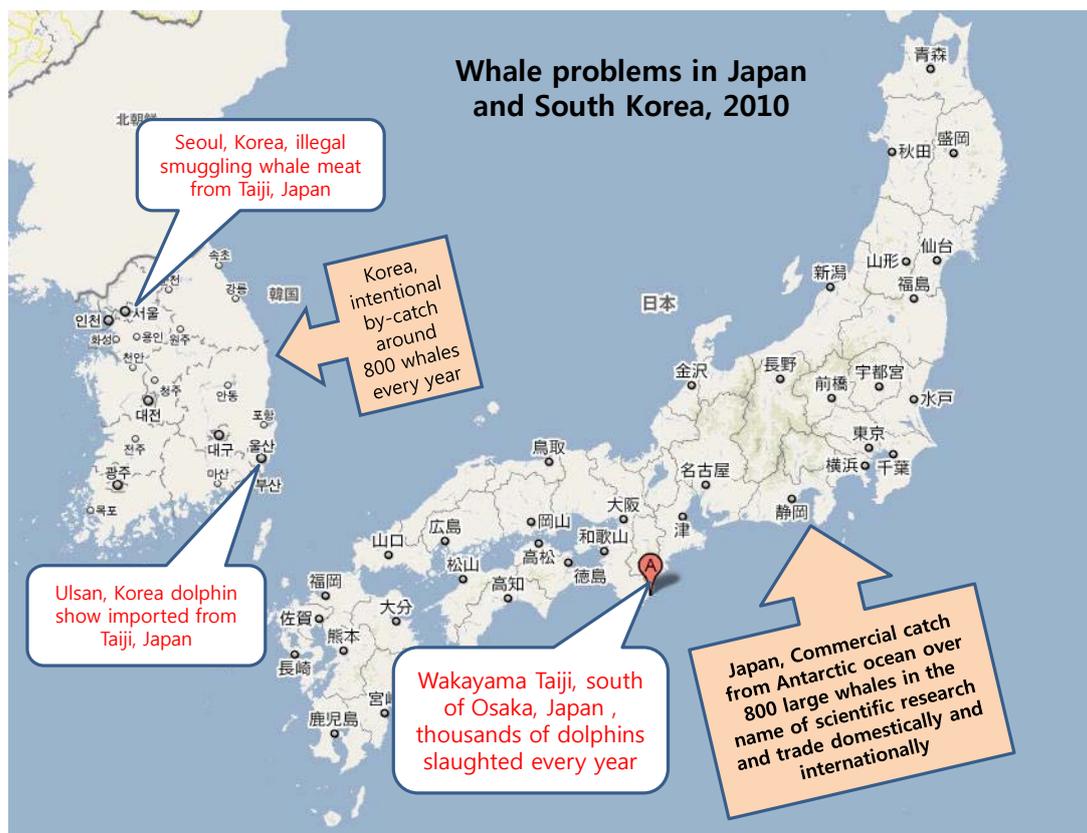


(Photo; Press conference held at KFEM on 14th Apr. Jun Ha Yoon, the head of the Ocean Committee, is holding a photo of a Japanese whaling ship in the Antarctic Ocean and points out the flaws of scientific whaling.)

On 17th June, Gyeongbuk Provincial Police announced that a group of more than ten men who have illegally killed Minke whales and distributed whale products were arrested. It is known that they have killed about 120 Minke whales a year in the East Sea(Sea of Japan). The police has confiscated 10 tonnes of frozen whale meat which would come from four Minke whales but the other 290 tonnes(about 116 Minke whales) are already on the market. The distribution channel is being investigated by the police. Police assume that half of the whale meat on the market is from

illegal source, raising concerns about our devastated oceans. There will be so-called "Whale Festival" in Ulsan from 1st July, but actually it can be called a "Whale meat Festival" where illegally sourced whale products are openly sold to the public. That is, Ulsan Metropolitan City encourages illegal trade of whale meat.

The director of "The Cove" Louie Psihoyos visited Jangsaenpo, Ulsan on 18th Mar and said that the dolphins in the aquarium in Ulsan came from Taiji where the dolphin slaughter took place.



We call for a decisive action of the IWC to help depleted whale populations to recover!
We are deeply concerned about the Ministry of Food, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries(MFAFF) who is pulling back from the Proposed Consensus Decision¹.
It is time for the Ministry of Environment to take responsibility of whale issues!

¹ Proposed Consensus Decision to Improve the Conservation of Whales from the Chair and Vice-Chair of the International Whaling Commission. Available on the IWC homepage(http://www.iwcoffice.org/_documents/commission/IWC62docs/62-7rev.pdf)

The 62th IWC meeting is being held between 21st and 25th June in Agadir in Morocco. This time, the IWC proposed a consensus decision in advance to put an end on consuming debates between anti and pro whaling nations since the moratorium on commercial whaling which came in effect in 1968. The key point of the proposed decision is to control all types of whaling that are currently occurring through scientific whaling and commercial whaling under objection, and reduce the catch limits.

The Ocean Committee indicated at a meeting held by the MFAFF on 4th June that the Ministry of Environment too needs to be involved in making the position of a nation over whaling issues because whales can be seen not only as marine resources but also as protected wildlife. However, the Ministry of Environment did not attend the meeting, proving the MFAFF's position is alone reflected in the national position. In fact, the MFAFF saw the proposed decision might block the possibility of South Korea getting into the whaling nations and said that it will demand additional whaling can be permitted in the future as long as RMP allows.

Until now, the MFAFF, representing the country, has supported whaling of Minke whales, common dolphins, finless porpoises, and so on in the Korean waters and is predicted to vote for resumption of whaling at this year's IWC meeting. People who are pro-whaling, including the MFAFF, claim that the proposed decision is very unfair as it is favouring current whaling nations and demand the expansion of commercial whaling. However, there is no firm evidence showing cetacean populations are fully recovered for more than 20 years since the moratorium came into effect. Although most countries have obeyed the moratorium, cetaceans have been suffering from pollution, climate change, and most of all effective commercial whaling in the name of scientific whaling or bycatch. The number of large whales caught in the international oceans since 1986 reaches 33,561.

It is the International Year of Biodiversity and the 10th meeting for the Convention on Biological Diversity will be held in Japan this October. As a party to the convention, South Korea has a responsibility to take measure to protect endangered species. Biodiversity decline is emerging as a major issue recently, with 25000~50000 species going extinct every year. It is expected that a quarter of the whole species on earth will completely disappear within 20~30 years. Main causes are known as climate change, habitat loss, overhunting or overfishing. When it comes to marine species, it is impossible to improve the situation without solving the problem of overfishing. Particularly cetacean species play a key role in the marine ecosystem as a top predator and therefore need an absolute protection.



(Posters; Designed by Ho Seop Yoon. Criticising Japanese whaling)

We take the proposed consensus decision of the IWC as pursuing realistic measures to find middle ground between anti and pro whaling. The main points of the proposed decision are as follows. 1) the moratorium on commercial whaling being retained, 2) The direct control of the IWC on catch limits for currently whaling nations, 3) No whaling in other areas or species to be allowed, 4) No other countries to be allowed to whale, 5) whale products to be consumed only domestically, 6) Setting up sustainable catch limit(cap) with Revised Management Procedure(RMP), 7) Organising Conservation Programme Committee to cope with conservation issues such as recovery of depleted populations, climate change, bycatch and others, 8) NGO's attendance with a right to speak, 9) compliance with other organisations such as CITES, 10) designating the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary, 11) setting up a collaboration programme that helps developing countries to manage marine resources and environment.

However, we think 1) that ban on commercial whaling must be extended until cetacean populations become healthy. The IWC admits that scientific whaling has actually been commercial whaling by allowing current whaling nations to keep whaling. We urge 2) that the IWC needs to consolidate its position as the international organisation responsible for conservation and management of cetaceans. In addition, as international trades of whale products, which is clearly against CITES, have been uncovered in South Korea and the US, more strong measures are needed to prevent a reoccurrence.

The international NGOs such as Greenpeace and WWF indicate the unsatisfying points and demand the follows. 1) to end all whaling in the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary, 2) whale products must be for domestic consumption only, 3) the RMP should be incorporated when setting catch limits, 4) no takes of threatened species and populations, 5) no scientific whaling, 6) all contracting governments to show commitment without any objection.

The Ocean Committee expects that Korean government will take a firm stand on wildlife

conservation, not pulling back from the consensus decision at the IWC meeting. Also, we strongly urge that the Ministry of Environment to make its position over wildlife conservation clear and actively engages in tuning government policies. In the poll taken in 2009, 67.9% of South Koreans opposed resumption of whaling and 72.8% expressed sympathy with the view that South Korea should keep protecting whales even though Japan insists on commercial whaling (results by Embrain, telephone poll taken with 700 men and women over 19 years old.) The representative who ignores a desire of the majority of the public cannot be a representative of the whole country.

What we demand,

1. Illegal trade of whale meat is confirmed with evidence. Korean police must tighten enforcement on illegal hunting and smuggling of whale products with cooperation with Interpol.
2. South Korean government needs to feel ashamed of seeing whales as food only when cetaceans in Korean seas are threatened by a massive scale of illegal hunting and international trade. Ministry of Environment should take responsibility of protecting whales!
3. It is not possible to protect whales unless whale meat is sold on the market. The government must prohibit commercial sales of whale products right now! Instead, devise ways to involve local people in conservation and save our oceans.
4. The IWC makes sure to stop Japanese scientific whaling and Norwegian commercial whaling and take decisive measures to protect the oceans.

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