

Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama
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Tokyo 100-8968, Japan

cc. Dr. Margaret Chan, Director-General World Health Organisation (WHO) and JECFA (Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives), 20 Avenue Appia, 1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland

Open letter regarding contaminated whale, dolphin and porpoise products from ongoing commercial hunts in Japan

23rd November 2009

Dear Prime Minister,

We represent citizens and organizations worldwide that have serious concerns about the slaughter of whales, dolphins and porpoises in your country and the sale of contaminated products which seriously jeopardizes the health of your citizens.

Your Government sets annual catch quotas for around 20,000 toothed cetaceans (dolphins, porpoises and toothed whales). In recent years, around 15,000 animals have been killed each year. Toothed cetacean products are sold across Japan and are even distributed to school and hospital canteens in some areas. However, these toothed cetaceans are highly contaminated with mercury, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and other toxic substances which have bio-accumulated through the food chain.

Since the 1980s, scientists from Japan and around the world have found alarmingly high levels of toxic substances in toothed cetacean products on sale in Japanese markets and supermarkets. Concentrations in some samples exceeded your Government's own safety limit for mercury by up to 5,000 times. Mercury and other toxic substances are 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).

A survey conducted by Elsa Nature Conservancy in 2008 found that more than 90 percent of people responding were not sufficiently informed about the high levels of toxic substances in dolphin products and therefore not aware of the serious health risks for consumers. Given the many peer-reviewed scientific publications available confirming the effects of these dangerous contaminant levels on consumers, we cannot understand why your Government continues to set quotas for these hunts, and why the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) is not taking action to prevent the sale and consumption of highly contaminated cetacean food products. The MHLW website does not even sufficiently inform Japanese citizens about the contamination levels in cetacean products, and its 2005 seafood advisory is totally inadequate to protect consumers from the health risks associated with consuming toothed cetacean products.

Legislation to ban the sale of contaminated cetacean products is urgently required. Until this legislation is enacted, we ask that you urge the Minister of Health to require retailers to display warning labels on all cetacean products, advising consumers of potentially high contamination levels.

Our Alliance notes that the *National Institute for Minamata Disease* (NIMD) has recently collected more than 1000 hair samples from citizens of the dolphin hunting town of Taiji, in Wakayama, to analyze the mercury content. We strongly welcome this step as an indication that authorities share our concerns about the health risks related to the consumption of toothed cetacean products. However, we are concerned at information published in AERA, the weekly magazine of Asahi Shimbun, which

suggests that the investigation was limited to biochemical analysis of the collected hair samples and did not include tests for neurological disorders that are recommended by leading Japanese medical scientists.

Despite the failure by national and local authorities to examine this issue comprehensively, it is clear from NIMD's preliminary results that there is great cause for concern. According to AERA, a 'significant' number of cases reported levels of mercury more than 20 times higher than national average levels and higher than levels known to cause central nervous system damage. Given the discovery of Minamata disease in the 1950s and the subsequent failure by the Government of Japan to respond to the major mercury poisoning event which resulted in the deaths of more than 1,700 people, we are shocked that the Japanese government is not taking a precautionary response to this problem.

We strongly urge your Government to refrain from setting any future catch quotas for toothed cetaceans and to prohibit the sale of polluted cetacean products. We respectfully request that you urge the respective agencies responsible for these issues to work closely with the newly established Consumers Affairs Agency to expedite this process to a satisfactory conclusion.

The world is now watching the new Japanese Government to see how it will handle this urgent matter: Will it continue to allow the cruel and unnecessary slaughter of dolphins and other toothed cetaceans or will it make the right decision and choose to protect Japanese people from the consumption of contaminated cetacean products?

We look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,



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For and on behalf of:

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 (トウルシー), Japan
NPO Uzu (うず), Japan
Warabe Mura (わらべ村), Japan
Whale & Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS), 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)

This letter was drafted by an international alliance of environmental organizations concerned about marine pollution and related human health effects which was established by Elsa Nature Conservancy (Japan), the Environmental Investigation Agency (UK), Oceancare (Switzerland), Pro Wildlife (Germany), Society for the Conservation of Marine Mammals (Denmark) and the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (UK).

Further information regarding contamination of cetacean products in Japan can be found via the links below:

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

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