

**A former Kaikoura marine biologist and author says attacks on a Japanese whaling fleet by the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, are long overdue.**

George Muller says Japan has only itself to blame for the recent incident at sea when the Sea Shepherd's vessel the Robert Hunter and the Japanese whaling ship the Kaiko Maru collided in the freezing Antarctic waters.

Each vessel has footage of the collision which caused the boats minimal damage but it is unclear which initiated the ramming.

Kaikoura woman Jaime Brown is aboard the vessel's sister ship, the Farley Mowat, and the anti-whaling group headed for Australia last Thursday after their fuel reserves started running low. The vessels had been in the icy waters for seven weeks.

Miss Brown was looking back to getting back to Kaikoura and hoped the society's actions over the past few weeks have "shone some light on the atrocities and injustices" that are occurring in the Southern Ocean.

"Perhaps now the Government will make a stand, act and enforce the laws which they helped pass. That way in the future a group of volunteers won't have to."

Miss Brown said a fire in the whaling fleet's factory ship the Nissian Maru meant there would be no more slaughter of whales.

"Spirits are high on the boat as we can now rest easy knowing no more whales will be slaughtered."

The group's tactics to stop whaling came under fire by the New Zealand Government and described by Conservation Minister Chris Carter as "stupid playground behaviour" and were putting lives at risk.

The collision of the two vessels was described as "eco-terrorism" by Japan but Mr Muller said Japan had only itself to blame for the attack.

"The recent clash at sea was inevitable.

"The Government of Japan has reaped what it has been sowing. It has forced its will on the rest of the world for too long and people have had enough," said Mr Muller.

"If Japan wasn't down in the Southern Ocean hunting whales illegally in violation of numerous international treaties then there wouldn't be an issue.

"Right now they have as much credibility as a burglar caught in the act by an irate homeowner."

He said Japan's expansion of its whaling programme this year could be the final straw for conservationists. Despite the ban on whaling, Japan plans to kill up to 1500 whales annually including 50 endangered fin whales and 50 humpbacks in the Antarctic.

"Desperate times call for desperate measures. A kill that large could decimate local sub-populations of whales.

There are only around 2000 humpbacks that pass through new Zealand waters -at that rate of slaughter they would last only for six years before becoming totally extinct."

Mr Muller recently published *Echoes in the Blue* a book he describes as an "eco-thriller" and based on his own experiences in the frontlines of wildlife and conservation, but he denies any links between his fact-based novel and the clash at sea.

"I'm not advocating violence. The book merely explores the argument that if the whaling ships are sunk it is likely they will cost too much to replace."

Despite huge revenue from the sale of whale meat, Mr Muller said whaling is inherently unprofitable due to the massive fuel bills involved which are paid by through generous subsidies by the Japanese Government.

"While I do not condone violence I can definitely understand the frustration shared by many people around the world. The Japanese Government has been thumbing its nose at the international community for over 20 years."

**By Alice Cowdrey, Kaikoura Star/Marlborough Express**