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Author “not sorry” over attack on whalers

February 2007, Nelson, NZ--New Zealand scientist and author C. George Muller says Japan has only itself to blame for the recent collisions at sea – and the attentions of militant environmental group Sea Shepherd.

“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.”

A marine biologist and author of a hard-hitting new book on whaling, Muller has previously described Japan’s whaling programme as “criminal”.

“Every year Japanese whalers violate the Southern Ocean Whale sanctuary and the Moratorium on commercial whaling by killing protected whales – including threatened and endangered species. Their claims to be undertaking scientific research are false. What they do is not research, but rather a cynical front to carry on commercial whaling in defiance of the worldwide ban.”

Whalemeat from Japan’s programme ends up for sale in markets and expensive restaurants where it is worth in excess of US\$33 million per year, something Muller says is “quite clearly commercial whaling in all but name.”

“For over twenty years Japan has repeatedly ignored international condemnation of their illegal hunt, and refuses to abide by all IWC resolutions requiring them to stop. It’s about time someone finally took them to task.”

Muller’s book predicts with uncanny accuracy the recent conflict at sea between anti-whaling protesters and the Japanese fleet – including ramming at sea and the fire aboard the factory ship. Despite the similarities to some of his book’s content though, Muller denies any links between his fact-based novel *Echoes in the Blue* and the latest violence 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 whalemeat, whaling is inherently unprofitable due to the massive fuel bills involved, and is made possible only by generous subsidies from the Japanese government.

Muller expressed sympathy for a Japanese crewman claimed to have been injured in the latest clash, but says the whaler must accept some responsibility for being there – as must 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 twenty years.”

Muller acknowledged that 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 1,500 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 2,000 Humpbacks that pass through New Zealand waters – at that rate of slaughter they would last for only five or six years before becoming locally extinct.”

Muller remains pessimistic that the conflict is over.

“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.”

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