

# Eco

International Whaling Commission Annual Meeting

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## New Minamata Plague in Japan

Dolphins and whales living in the oceans are top level predators of fish and other organisms. In polluted nearshore environments, and even on the high seas, concentration of pollutants, notably mercury, PCB's, and heavy metals, are likely. Mercury is a potent neuro-toxin, and scientists have found that even low concentrations can cause damage to nervous systems. Developing fetuses and children are especially at

risk. Time and time again, samples of dolphin and whale meat destined for human consumption in Japan markets have been demonstrated to carry heavy loads of dangerous poisons and toxins — a Minamata disease vector still completely ignored by the Japanese government, to the detriment of Japanese citizens. Dolphin meat mercury levels are deemed higher than the mercury levels in fish that caused the

Minamata disaster in Japan in the 1950's.

2006: On December 22, 2006, *The Japan Times* tested a random sample of dolphin meat (*iruka niku*) sold at the Shingu Central Okuwa Supermarket for total mercury with a readout of 5.40 ppm—13.5 times higher than the maximum advisory level of 0.4ppm, set by the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry of Japan.

2006: The Elsa Nature Conservancy concludes on page two

## Japan Supermarket Chain Bans Sale of Dolphin Meat

On December 26, 2006, the director of food products for the Okuwa Supermarket Corporation, Mr. Yasunari Kanki, banned the sale of all dolphin meat in all of their stores. The ban is now permanent, according to a statement from Okuwa:

“We have decided, as a matter of company policy, that we will discontinue permanently the sale of dolphin meat

regardless of test results currently being conducted by the company at an



independent lab.” The supermarket adds: “Those test results will be

concluded next week, but the results will not be revealed.”

The Save Japan Dolphins coalition (Earth Island Institute, Elsa Nature Conservancy of Japan, Animal Welfare Institute, and In Defense of Animals) applauds this major development in efforts to stop the Japanese dolphin slaughter. Our concludes on page three

## Environmental Scientists Warn of Toxic Whale Meat

The world's leading environmental scientists last week issued a sharp warning that exposure to mercury and industrial chemicals is dooming fetuses and babies to a lifetime of health problems, including cancer, fertility problems, diabetes, and brain damage.

At a conference of toxicologists, biologists, pediatricians and epidemiologists in the Faroe Islands, the scientists singled out the catastrophic mercury poisoning of the Faroese people

because of their long-term consumption of toxic pilot whale meat, which is produced in a bloody drive fishery along the coast of the Danish island chain.

Despite warnings and reports produced by environmental groups going back to the early 1980's, the Danish government has scandalously covered up the massive poisoning of Faroese children who were fed whale meat or whose mothers consumed whale meat while pregnant. Similar human

poisoning from toxic whale meat has been occurring in Greenland, also a Danish territory. This problem has been identified in whale and dolphin meat sold in Japan, as well (see accompanying story).

The Danish government and Faroese authorities have recklessly defended the whale massacres at the IWC while callously condemning tens of thousands of their citizens to lifetimes of concludes on page four

**Minimata**, concluded from page one of Japan, a member of the Save Japan Dolphins Coalition, bought two packages of short-finned pilot whale (*gondou*) meat at a supermarket run by the Taiji Fishery Cooperative on November 7, 2006. One package of the whale meat showed as much as 3.82ppm of mercury, which is 9.55 times higher than the maximum advisory level of 0.4ppm, set by the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry of Japan. The other package of pilot whale meat showed 1.31ppm, which is 3.275 times higher than the maximum advisory level. The tests were done by the local governmental Inspection Center of Public Health in Ibaraki Prefecture.

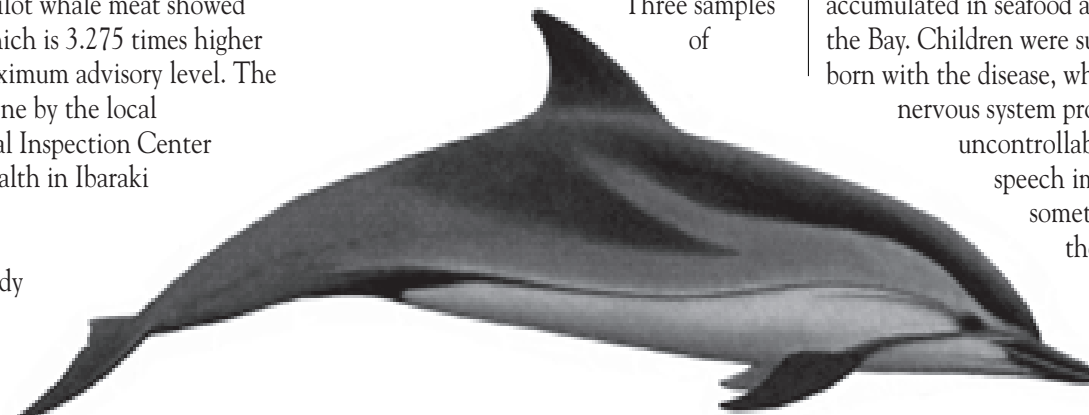
2004: A scientific study revealed the harmful effects of exposure to mercury on brain development in children due to consumption of whale meat and some fish. This renewed concerns that the Japanese Government continues to sell whale, dolphin and porpoise meat which, the Environmental Investigation Agency has shown, contains levels of mercury in excess of their own health guidelines. The study, carried out in the Danish Faroe Islands over a 14-year period, suggested that post-natal exposure to methylmercury can cause children to suffer developmental problems, and disruption is exacerbated by continued consumption of mercury-containing products. It also supported concerns that damage caused by pre-natal exposure to methylmercury may be irreversible. People living in the Faroe Islands are exposed to high levels of mercury and methylmercury through their seafood-rich diet, which includes pilot whale meat. ("Delayed brainstem auditory evoked potential latencies in 14-year-old children exposed to methylmercury" by

Murata, K., Weihe, P., Budtz-Jørgensen, E., Jørgensen, P.J., Grandjean, P., *The Journal of Pediatrics*, February 2004. p177-183.)

2004: In February 2004, independent researchers working with the Environmental Investigation Agency purchased a range of products through the Internet from the Japanese company Ishinomaki Suisan and analysed them in Japan for

contaminants.

Three samples of



canned whale stew contained an average of 1.10ppm mercury and 0.67ppm methylmercury, almost three times higher than levels allowed under Japan's food safety legislation.

2001 - 2003: Chemical analyses of 72 meat and blubber samples of small whales and dolphins purchased from Japanese supermarkets by the nonprofit Environmental Investigation Agency revealed that government-permitted levels for mercury exceeded the Japanese Government's allowable levels in 60% of products. The average mercury level was 1.88ppm (parts per million), close to five times the maximum allowable level set by Japan. The average concentration of methylmercury was 1.11ppm, nearly four times the maximum allowable levels. DNA analyses commissioned by EIA and other groups have consistently shown that the fraudulent sale of dolphin and porpoise products labelled as whale is widespread in Japan. One sample of bottlenose dolphin meat sold as whale contained concentrations of

mercury over 50 times higher than the permitted level. (Chemical analyses of the products were carried out at the Daiichi College of Pharmaceutical Sciences in Fukuoka.)

*Note on Minimata Disease:* Over many decades, mercury-contaminated waste from a Chisso Corporation plastics manufacturing plant on Kyushu Island, Japan systematically spilled into nearby Minamata Bay. Local residents became poisoned by the mercury which accumulated in seafood and shellfish in the Bay. Children were subsequently born with the disease, which attacks the nervous system producing uncontrollable movements, speech impairment and sometimes death. In the 1950's when Minamata disease was first identified and traced to the plant, more

than 100 victims had been identified. The sediment in the Bay remains contaminated, and fishing is still prohibited there. An estimated 10,000 victims of Minamata disease still exist, and at least 3,000 more have died from the disease.

**Conclusion:** The Japanese government, in order to promote whaling and the continued slaughter of dolphins, is ignoring the scientific evidence that dolphin meat should not be eaten, due to the very real danger of more Minamata-like outbreaks of deaths, fetal damage, and severe, permanent neuro-toxin damage to babies. The slaughter of dolphins and whales for food in Japan is poisoning the people of Japan. The sale of mercury-contaminated dolphin and whale meat on the Japanese market must cease immediately. Until the Japanese government takes action, individual stores and markets must ban such sales immediately.

## Japan and Respect

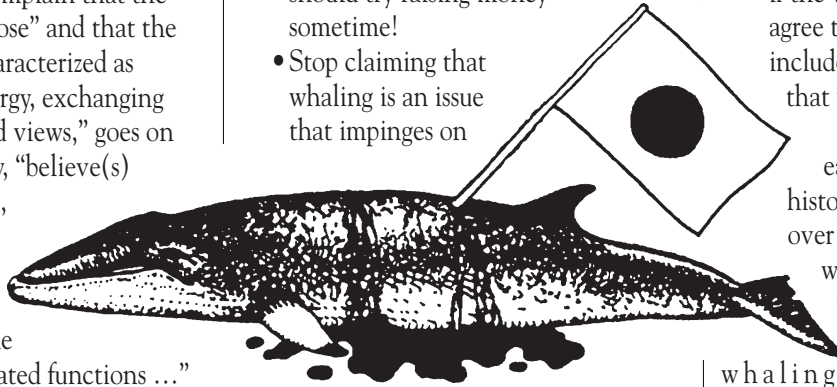
A new Japan has been in evidence at the beginning of this year's IWC meeting. Japan's opening statement, while continuing to complain that the IWC "has lost its purpose" and that the meetings "could be characterized as spending time and energy, exchanging irreconcilably polarized views," goes on to offer that Japan now, "believe(s) that less confrontation, mutual respect, the building of trust and doing more by consensus can bring the IWC back to its mandated functions ..."

Japan's delegation even turned down the opportunity to have the entire IWC waste hours on voting on selected agenda items that Japan opposes, such as the Conservation Committee, whale-watching, and other environmental issues that harm whales.

ECO takes the Japanese Fisheries Agency at its word, and so suggests that

Japan, Norway and Iceland take the following steps:

- Stop claiming that nonprofit conservation organizations are only at the IWC "to raise money." You should try raising money sometime!
- Stop claiming that whaling is an issue that impinges on



fisheries management. There is no scientific basis to claim the depleted whale stocks are somehow harming food fish resources.

- Acknowledge that whalewatching and other conservation goals of IWC member nations have merit. ECO believes that these

environmental/conservation activities for live whales in fact have *more* merit than simply butchering whales for contaminated meat that nobody wants to buy. But if the whaling nations will simply agree that these issues should be included in the dialog at the IWC, that would be a good start.

Respect has to be earned, especially given the history of the IWC in presiding over the demise of the world's whale stocks, in large part due to overhunting by Japan, Norway, Iceland, and other

whaling nations in the past. At least many of the world's past whaling nations have taken the position that whales should now be protected because of the damage done in the past to these magnificent animals. The pro-whaling countries should acknowledge their part in that unrestrained slaughter that brought many whales species to the very brink of extinction.

**Dolphin Meat**, concluded from page one coalition members formally thank the Okuwa Supermarket chain for their landmark decision to protect the Japanese people from contaminated food products. The supermarket chain and conglomerate is comprised of drug stores, movie theatres, home store centers, sports clubs, hotels and amusement facilities.

Dr. Tetsuya Endo of the Hokkaido Health Science University, the Dai Ichi Health Science University, and New Zealand Health Science University conducted a three-year joint study of mercury levels in dolphin meat from dolphins caught off the coast of Japan—including Taiji. They found very high levels of mercury in every sample of dolphin meat that they tested. Their conclusion: nobody should consume dolphin meat. Dr. Endo is a highly respected Japanese scientist. His report on mercury tainted dolphin meat was

published in 2005.

Meanwhile, the Japanese Minister of Health and Welfare has known about the danger yet has chosen not to warn the public about it.

The second random sample of dolphin meat (*iruka niku*) sold at the Shingu Central Okuwa Supermarket was tested for total mercury with a readout of 5.40 ppm — 14 times above the Koseisho's advisory level of 0.4 ppm. The first sample tested in February was more than four times the advisory level at 1.77 ppm.

Richard O'Barry, on behalf of the coalition called the announcement: "a bold decision that should immediately be followed by other sources of this toxic meat." He continued: "We also salute the only newspaper in Japan reporting this most urgent and controversial issue—*The Japan Times*."

Approximately 23,000 dolphins, porpoises and other small whales are

slaughtered in Japan every year. David Phillips, Director of Earth Island Institute's Int'l Marine Mammal Project stated: "It is crucial that we track where all this poisoned dolphin meat is going and stop its sale." He continued: "The Japanese public deserve better than to have this toxic product on their store shelves, and the dolphins deserve better than this cruel slaughter."

O'Barry continued: "We must also get the dolphin trainers and dolphin dealers out of Taiji. Leading aquariums and swim-with-dolphin dealers are subsidizing the Japan dolphin slaughter by paying \$50,000 or more for a few 'show' dolphins from the catch—the rest of the pod is slaughtered for dolphin meat on the Japanese market for much less money."

For further information on the Save Japan Dolphins Coalition effort to end the Japan dolphin slaughter, visit: <http://www.SaveJapanDolphins.org>

## Homeland Insecurity

Dolphin activist Richard O'Barry was rousted from the grounds of the Captain Cook Hotel on Sunday morning. Surrounded by local police, security guards, and NMFS enforcement personnel, he was asked by the hotel to leave the premises. It seems they

recognized him from last year.

In St. Kitts last year, O'Barry livened up the proceedings by walking into the Plenary session wearing a TV screen on his chest which was showing video footage of the dolphin slaughter in Taiji, Japan and other coastal cities. He paraded past the large and astonished Japanese delegation before security

surrounded him and hustled him from the hall.

O'Barry insists that his visit this year to the IWC is innocent. "I did that protest last year," he said. But the hotel and the security division apparently were not interested.

Good to know how safe we all are in the city of Anchorage!

*Toxic Whales*, concluded from page one debilities and disease. A similar cover-up is taking place in Japan, where the government refuses to ban the consumption of mercury-laden whale and dolphin meat despite appeals from scientists and health authorities.

The Faroes conference, organized by the World Health Organization, European Environment Agency, National Institutes of Health and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, issued a four-page statement calling for immediate international action to prevent exposure to environmental toxicants.

Leading the campaign are Dr. Philippe Grandjean of Harvard University and the University of Southern Denmark, and Dr. Pal Weihe, a researcher at the Faroese Hospital System. They have studied the effects of mercury on children for more than two decades, using the poisoned youngsters of the Faroe Islands as their case study.

The declaration by the 200 scientists last week paints a picture: when and newborns ingest toxic substances such as mercury and PCB's (also found in high levels in the meat of toothed whales and dolphins), development of critical organs and functions can be

abnormal. In a process called "fetal programming," the children are then susceptible to diseases later in life, and may even pass those altered traits on to their children and grandchildren.

Recent research on animals indicates that industrial chemicals can alter "gene expression" - turning on or off genes that predispose humans to disease. Although the DNA itself would not be altered, genetic misfires in the womb may be permanent, and

are not optimal."

For decades, Faroese fishermen have driven pods of migrating pilot whales into coves and harbors, where

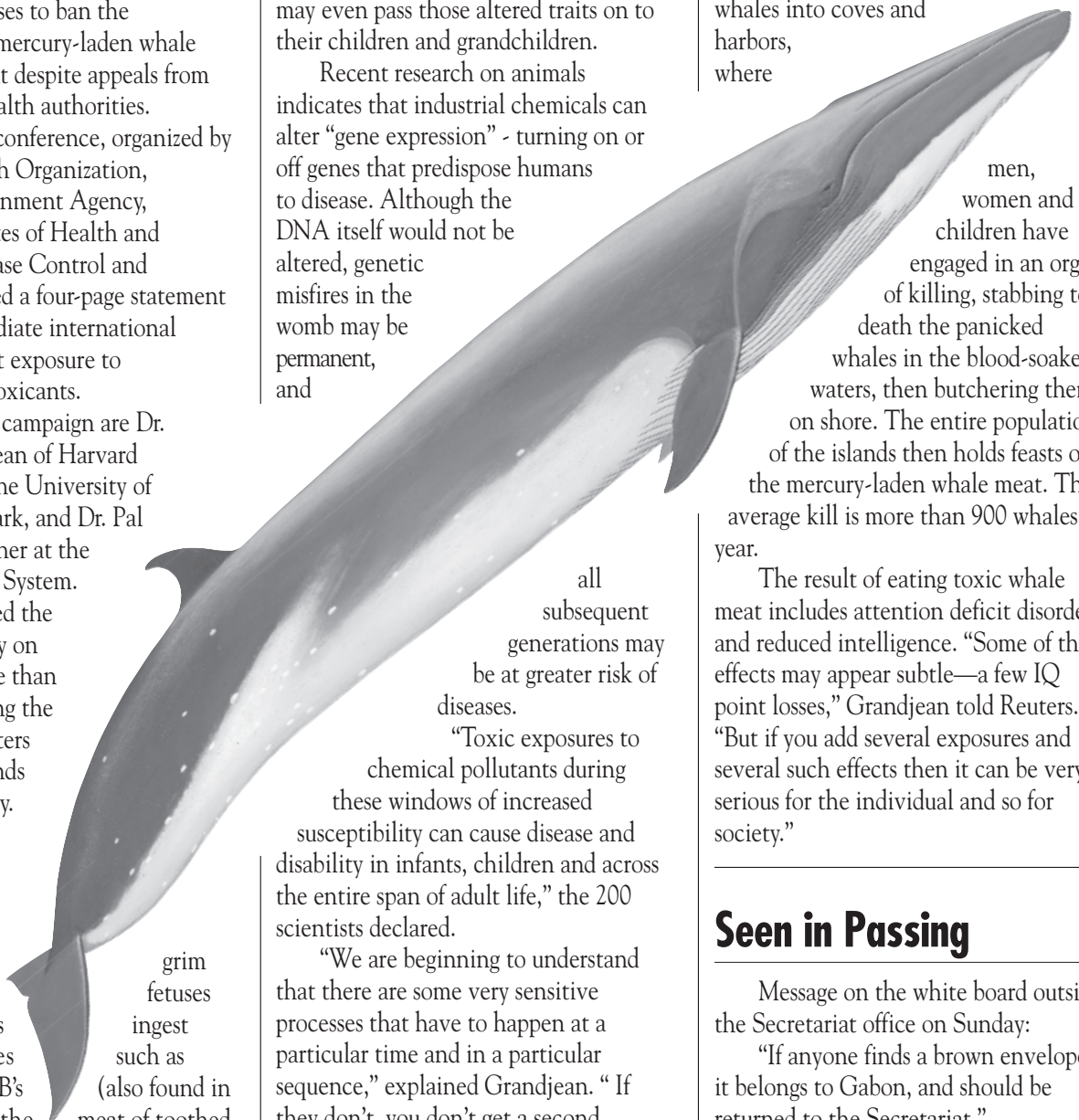
men, women and children have engaged in an orgy of killing, stabbing to death the panicked whales in the blood-soaked waters, then butchering them on shore. The entire population of the islands then holds feasts of the mercury-laden whale meat. The average kill is more than 900 whales a year.

The result of eating toxic whale meat includes attention deficit disorder and reduced intelligence. "Some of these effects may appear subtle—a few IQ point losses," Grandjean told Reuters. "But if you add several exposures and several such effects then it can be very serious for the individual and so for society."

all subsequent generations may be at greater risk of diseases.

"Toxic exposures to chemical pollutants during these windows of increased susceptibility can cause disease and disability in infants, children and across the entire span of adult life," the 200 scientists declared.

"We are beginning to understand that there are some very sensitive processes that have to happen at a particular time and in a particular sequence," explained Grandjean. "If they don't, you don't get a second chance. The child will be stuck with a brain, lungs or an immune system that



grim fetuses ingest such as mercury and PCB's (also found in high levels in the meat of toothed whales and dolphins), development of critical organs and functions can be

## Seen in Passing

Message on the white board outside the Secretariat office on Sunday:

"If anyone finds a brown envelope, it belongs to Gabon, and should be returned to the Secretariat."

So, what's in that envelope, Gabon???