

Whaling movement decried

Animal welfare activist criticizes killing for research

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Staff writer

Since antiwhaling efforts have become a symbol of the international environmental movement, Japan's calls for the resumption of commercial whaling are damaging its image in the industrialized world, said the founder of an international organization for animal welfare.

Brian Davies, who serves as chairman of the International Fund for Animal Welfare, criticized Japan's argument of killing whales for the purpose of scientific research.

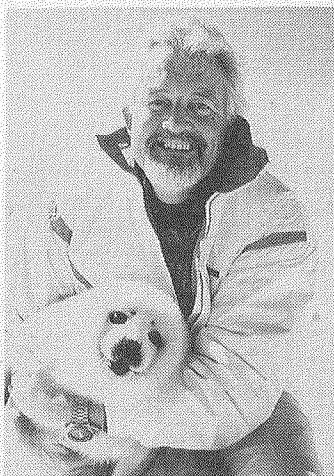
"It is poor science to believe you have to kill whales to conduct research," he said. "Killing whales for research is an excuse for killing them to sell their meat."

His organization has been conducting research on whales' behavior and sound patterns for five years. He said information on live whale behavior is much better than any kind of data obtained through the study of dead whales.

Davies is visiting Japan at the invitation of Takashi Kosugi, a Diet member and president of GLOBE International, an organization made up of environmentally-conscious politicians from the United States, Europe, Russia and Japan.

His arrival came just before the 46th Annual Meeting of the International Whaling Commission, scheduled for May 23-27 in Mexico.

The 59-year-old lover of whales has met with Prime Minister Tsutomu Hata, Foreign Minister Koji Kakizawa



Brian Davies

and Toshiko Hamayotsu, director general of the environment agency, as well as officials from the Fisheries Agency and other Diet members.

He will visit Kochi Prefecture, a popular whale watching area, before leaving Japan.

Whales are a symbol for Americans and Europeans just like Mount Fuji and cherry blossoms are symbolic for the Japanese, Davies claimed.

He said he does not think cultural differences matters much in the whaling issue.

"I've been to many countries and found that things that unite us are far greater than the things that divide us," he said. "I think the Japanese can share our love for whales as a special species."

His belief is backed by a Fisheries Agency study that found 23.5 percent of people polled said they oppose whaling. Davies said more and more Japanese are feeling

the same way as Americans and Europeans.

Although the U.S. conducted whaling until the 1970s to produce oil for fuel, it ceased the practice after wide-scale petroleum use ended the need for whale oil. Japanese may have needed whale meat to survive after World War II, but it is not necessary now, Davies said.

Davies has loved animals since his childhood in Wales, and was prompted to take up his current position by the sight of a seal being skinned alive on the ice floes off the east coast of Canada. The seal was one of 180,000 killed in the area every year.

In 1969, he established IFAW to fight to save baby seals. It took 19 years before he saw the Canadian government announce a total ban on the commercial killing of whitecoats and bluebacks and the European Union, then known as the European Community, vote against the import of baby sealskins and any products made from baby sealskins.

IFAW, which now has 1.3 million members worldwide, has expanded the subjects of its campaign, which now range from bees and whales to puppies and iguanas. The organization plans to open an office in Japan sometime this year.

Davies said he wants to do something to help in the formation of public policy along with other nongovernmental organizations.

"We would like to be part of a new Japan where public debate is listened to by politicians and by bureaucrats," he said.