

AGENCY HITS SCIENTISTS' REPORT

Illegal whaling claim rebutted

The Fisheries Agency has rebutted a study by two foreign scientists who claim Japan may have imported or hunted whales illegally for sale on the domestic market, agency officials said Monday.

In a report published in Science magazine in September, C.S. Baker of the University of Auckland and S.R. Palumbi of the University of Hawaii said their molecular genetic testing of whale meat sold in Japan indicates the country may have hunted or imported some species of whales that are forbidden on the domestic market, such as fin whale and humpback whale.

Their research indicates "products available currently on the Japanese retail market

may include species that have been imported illegally and others that have been hunted or processed illegally."

The agency countered that the pair's test methods were so sloppy the results are not trustworthy.

The two scientists said they conducted the testing using samples purchased in retail markets in Tokyo, Osaka, Wakayama, Hiroshima and Shimonoseki, Yamaguchi Prefecture, in April 1993.

They compared the DNA sequences from the purchased meats to "type" sequences of various whale species to identify the species of the samples.

The agency says such DNA type sequences for whales are

still inadequate to use in such testing.

It also argues that the report includes inexplicable claims, such as that the DNA of two different species were found in a single sample.

The agency also notes that the meat identified as finback whale was purchased at ¥300 to ¥400 per 100 grams, which is too cheap compared with its usual market price of around ¥2,000.

The agency sent its officials to a symposium in the United States last month to present a counterargument to the report.

Baker has so far responded only that he is ready to present the samples if necessary, the agency officials said.

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