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SEA SHEPHERD'S SHEPHERDS

The United States, Australia, New Zealand and the Netherlands all mischaracterized Sea Shepherd as a protest organization in the Safety at Sea discussion on Wednesday.

What does Sea Shepherd say? Here are just a few quotes that demonstrate that the "protest" label is plain wrong.

"We're not a protest organisation. We go for the money and cut their profits... our objective from the very beginning was to sink the Japanese whaling fleet economically, to bankrupt them, and I think we've been able to achieve that." ABC (Australia Broadcasting Corporation) 6 March 2011.

"We're an interventionist organization, not a protest organization. Protest is very submissive it's like saying, "please please, please, don't kill the whales." Earth Island Journal September 22, 2010.

"The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society is not a protest organization. Sea Shepherd is an anti-poaching organization and these two seiners are poachers." Sea Shepherd press release 17 June 2010. Sea Shepherd Frees 800 Bluefin from Floating Cages Below Libya's Infamous Line of Death.

" 'We're not a protest organisation. We intervene against illegal activities, and as far as we're concerned Japanese whalers are poachers. The oceans are being pillaged and we are the only organisation out on the high seas trying to do something about it,' he says." UK Observer January 10, 2010.

"We're not a protest organisation. We take action against poaching operations and I see nothing wrong with sinking a vessel that's involved with illegal exploitation of an endangered species." The New Zealand Herald January 9, 2010.

So why are flag and port states treating violent saboteurs as if they were peaceful protesters? Could it be that sympathy with the saboteurs' cause is leading nations to not enforce appropriate laws and standards? Anyone listening to the Dutch statement on Wednesday would have been hard put not to come to the conclusion that Sea Shepherd is being deliberately protected from meeting its maritime obligations.

As Russia said, Sea Shepherd is engaged in ecological terrorism. The saboteurs are quite open about their objectives. Perhaps it is time for the shepherds of Sea Shepherd to think again. A good place for the Netherlands to start would be to apply relevant International Maritime Organization

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(IMO) instruments, such as the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW).

And while we are at it, we should also remember that Sea Shepherd justifies its life-threatening Antarctic attacks by denigrating the value of the research. Sea Shepherd is able to do this so wantonly precisely because some nations – and not just the flag and port states – persist in prefixing any reference to the research with the words “so-called”. Every time this language is repeated by government officials, it feeds Sea Shepherd’s conviction that its violence can be justified. This is not a responsible approach.

As Toshikazu Miyamoto, Director of Global Guardian Trust, told this meeting when considering the broad field of scientific research: “Research takes place when there is an identified need, not when there is a global consensus that it should be carried out.” The fact that somebody doesn’t like some research work doesn’t make it bogus. It is high time for IWC delegates to move away from these dangerous point-scoring word games.

SAVE THE CAMPAIGNER

If there was any logic left in the discourse on whaling, those who have enriched themselves with their ‘save the whale’ campaigns over the past three decades would be sending off their banners and placards to recycling yards and admitting that they had got it all horribly wrong. Far from being perpetually on the verge of extinction, as the public has been led to believe, whale species are not threatened by hunting. A new estimate by the Scientific Committee puts the population of minke whales at between 515,000 and 720,000 in the Antarctic.

But let’s not expect any heartfelt apologies or mea culpas. Campaigners have earned hundreds of millions of dollars on the back of misinformation that whale hunting was pushing species to the brink. Those organizations still need their income, those employees still need to be paid and those “doing my bit for the planet” egos still need to be fed.

Meanwhile, most IWC delegations are committed to protecting whales from utilization. The fact that institutionalized population-coddling is actually unnecessary is therefore something that has to be brushed over. Government jobs have been built on the premise that whales need special protection. Now no one is quite sure why.

To borrow a phrase from Al Gore, the new abundance estimates are a hugely Inconvenient Truth. In the dysfunctional surroundings of an IWC meeting, such a monumental piece of news loses its significance. But the reality is that those who advocate total protection for abundant species are nothing less than supporters of animal rights.

Based on their success to date in duping so many with their politically-driven agenda, the campaigners will be able to do a fine job of saving themselves.
