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### **A MAJORITY BOUGHT, NOT WON**

With the next meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) now in sight (in May 2002) the signs are that the Japanese Government is dangerously close to buying its way to a majority in that meeting. Once Japan – determined to re-start commercial whaling, controls the votes it can determine the future of the world's whales.

The last IWC meeting was rocked by an admission by a senior member of the Japanese delegation that the Fisheries Agency of Japan used Overseas Development Assistance to encourage countries to vote with Japan. The admission was confirmed by the Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda who admitted that his country votes with Japan in return for foreign aid. Through its blatant vote buying the Japanese Government is corrupting the IWC. At the 53<sup>rd</sup> IWC meeting in London in July 2001, the Fisheries Agency had recruited a group of nine countries who vote with Japan on every issue.

More vote buying is under way right now. Fisheries Agency officials are travelling all over the world, offering development assistance to countries which will join the IWC and vote with Japan. They are thought to be concentrating especially on West Africa, although they are active in other areas as well.

If this vote buying drive is not stopped, the Fisheries Agency may well assemble a pro whaling majority at the IWC by the time of the May 2002 meeting. There will be little warning. The past strategy of the Agency has been to get its new recruits to join just before the meeting.

Armed with a pro whaling majority, the Fisheries Agency will waste little time in expanding its whaling operations. Its first act will legitimise its so-called 'scientific' whaling and expand it to take more whales. Then it will move to overturn the whale sanctuaries that provide protection for some populations of whales throughout their life cycle.

At present the IWC is split between those who want the Commission to maintain its hard won moratorium on whaling and become more conservation oriented with a focus on recovery and conservation of whale populations, and the pro whalers, consisting mostly of countries whose votes are bought in return for aid. These pro-whaling nations want the moratorium overturned and the hunt resumed for as many species as possible. Once the Fisheries Agency of Japan gains a majority, the IWC will be transformed back into a body controlled by the whaling industry, actively pushing for an immediate resumption of large scale factory ship whaling. The global hunting of whales will begin again and the future will be bleak for the world's remaining whales.

*\* The 2002 IWC meeting will be held in May 2002 in Shimonoseki, Southern Japan, the home port of the Japanese whaling fleet.*

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