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RIGGING THE SYSTEM : HOW JAPAN IS BUYING CONTROL OF THE IWC

The Fisheries Agency of Japan, despairing of convincing other countries at the International Whaling Commission (IWC) to vote for a resumption of commercial whaling, decided in 1999 to escalate their vote buying offensive and provide themselves with a majority of votes at the IWC. At that time Japan already controlled the votes of seven IWC members, six from the Eastern Caribbean.

We got a rare glimpse into how vote buying works when Japan's then Vice Minister of Fisheries, Mr. Hiroaki Kameya, shortly after his return from the 1999 meeting of the IWC, decided to keep the press briefed on these activities. Kameya informed Japan's biggest wire service, Kyodo, that the ministry would work actively, using Overseas Development Aid (ODA) to persuade developing countries which are not members of the IWC to join it and support resumed commercial whaling.

His statements were reported on June 2, 1999, and the wire story went on to say: 'Because anti-whaling countries' attitudes are stubborn, it is judged that it is more advantageous for future negotiations to dig up supporting votes by increasing member countries than by trying to split opposing votes.'

Vice Minister Kameya got down to digging quickly. On 11 June a fisheries newspaper had reported that Kameya, in a meeting with pro whaling parliamentarians, had set a target of an additional 13 countries joining and named Morocco as a possible new member.

On August 17 another fisheries newspaper reported that he had departed for Zimbabwe, Namibia and Guinea to "explain Japan's position of whaling and the IWC and CITES and appeal to take united steps". On August 30, the same paper reported on his return from Africa, quoting him as saying: "I requested the three nations to join the IWC from a perspective of sustainable use of marine resources including whales. All agreed. The Prime Minister of Guinea showed his will to join by the next year's meeting."

After August, 1999, the reports stopped, but we have seen the results. Guinea joined the IWC in time for the 2000 meeting and cast the same vote as Japan every time it voted. Morocco joined in 2001 and voted with Japan except for some tactical abstentions taken to avoid accusations of vote selling. Zimbabwe attended as an observer in 2000.

Namibia attended as an observer in 2001 and made a statement to the IWC saying "Namibia, however, cannot support conservation for the sake of conservation. Where the best scientific advice indicates that a resource can be harvested sustainably, harvesting must be allowed." In addition to the African countries another recipient of Japanese aid, Panama, joined in 2001 and cast the same vote as Japan throughout the meeting.

In the run-up to the 2001 meeting a senior member of the Japanese delegation, Mr Komatsu, confirmed that vote buying was Japan's chosen means of securing a return to whaling in an interview with ABC TV in Australia. Mr. Komatsu admitted that Japan uses ODA to buy support

for the resumption of commercial whaling, saying that Japan had to use the "tools of diplomatic communications and promises of overseas development aid to influence members of the International Whaling Commission".

This was independently corroborated by the Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, Lester Bird. "Partly, yes, quite frankly I make no bones about it," he said when asked whether his administration was supporting whaling because of the aid his country was getting from Japan. The Caribbean News Agency, CANA, also reported Prime Minister Bird as saying: "So long as the whales are not an endangered species, I don't see any reason why if we are able to support the Japanese, and the quid pro quo is that they are going to give us some assistance, I am not going to be a hypocrite; that is part of why we do so."

Prime Minister Bird's honesty is unusual. Most of the countries whose vote has been bought deny it. Despite Mr. Komatsu's admission, the Fisheries Agency of Japan still denies that it buys votes. But the vote buying offensive goes on, with Africa as its main target. Caribbean delegates talking outside the 2001 meeting were overheard suggesting there would be 10 new African members by the 2002 meeting. An August 2001 story from a newspaper in St. Lucia, which has been selling its vote to Japan for years, quotes their Minister of Agriculture as saying "It is expected that more African countries will join the IWC by the time the organisation holds its 2002 annual meeting in Japan."

The last time the IWC met in Japan was in 1993. The Japanese press reported on a premeeting vote buying drive calling it a "bankroll offensive" and cited "stories circulating that the economic assistance recklessly spent by the Japanese government for vote consolidation this time exceeded 300 million dollars." After the meeting ended Mr. Tanabu, then the Minister of Fisheries, said "Now it is appreciated that to block things like the Antarctic sanctuary we need to increase our colleagues/friends in the IWC."

The Fisheries Agency's vote buying programme is gathering momentum. At the 1993 meeting the Fisheries Agency had just four countries on their payroll. By 1999 there were seven. Japan brought one new country into the IWC in 2000 and two more in 2001. The Agency now enjoys the support of 10 nations whose votes are paid for. The votes of these countries, combined with those of nations like China, Korea, Norway and Russia, which vote with Japan for their own reasons mean that the Fisheries Agency is within three or four votes of having a majority in the IWC.

Unless their vote buying activities are addressed, the Fisheries Agency of Japan is likely to get a majority before the 2002 meeting and use that majority to set the IWC on the track back to resumed commercial whaling.

DECEMBER 2001