Sanctions on Japan

On the 13 September 2000, the Government announced that it was banning Japanese fishing vessels from American waters. According to White House Secretary-General John Podesta, it is also considering imposing other trade sanctions on Japan in protest against its flouting of the international moratorium on whaling. White House Trade Secretary, Norman Mineta, said that the President had also asked his Administration to examine within 60 days additional measures, including possible trade sanctions.

The Trade Secretary argued that Japan has no scientifically valid grounds to justify continued whaling. The White House confirmed that if Japan were to honour the moratorium, the United States would be ready to conduct a joint scientific programme on whales that does not threaten their survival.

The United States recently accused Japan of trying to increase whaling in the Pacific. Japan, which already takes 440 minke whales per year, announced that it proposes to extend this programme to include 10 sperm whales and 50 other rorquals annually, although both species are protected under US law. Japan defends the legal grounds for its scientific whale fishery, pointing out that it is authorised to kill several hundred whales per year under the terms of the moratorium signed in 1986.

However, the ban on Japanese fishermen operating in American waters is little more than a symbolic gesture, as the US has barred foreign fishermen access to their exclusive economic zone (EEZ) for the past 12 years.

The Japanese authorities have protested strongly at the announcement of possible sanctions. The Minister for Agriculture, Forests and Fisheries, Yoichi Tani, warned US representatives against carrying out their threat to impose trade sanctions on his country. Government Secretary-General Hidenao Nakagawa tried to minimise the impact of the sanctions announced. He indicated that Japanese vessels did not fish in the areas concerned, and that the US action would therefore have no direct impact on Japan’s fishing fleet.

The Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori defended Japan’s whaling activities, insisting that research was being conducted in accordance with the national framework. He pointed out that his country’s right to catch whales is guaranteed under international legislation. The Fisheries Minister explained that research conducted by Japan within the legal framework of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) aims to determine the effects of pollution of the oceans on whales and to gain a better understanding of the habits and lifestyles of the species.

The Japanese Government stated that they were ready to hold talks with United States representatives at any time. They emphasised the need to avoid “emotional reactions” and insisted that dialogue must be pursued in a scientific context. (MJ)

China

Policy Developments

Tax Incentives for Cleaner Cars

According to a statement released jointly by the Ministry of Finance and the State Administration of Taxation, China will cut the sales tax by 30 per cent for cars that have reached the European Union “Euro-II” emission standards. These standards, which came into effect in the EU in 1996, call for carbon emission limits of 2.2 grams/kilometre, hydrocarbons plus nitrogen oxides limits of 0.5 g/km, and zero limits for particulate matter.

Although China already has a compulsory limit on automobile emissions, these are enforced very erratically. The report states that manufacturers must have their products examined by government-authorised quality control agents, in order to qualify for the tax break. The statement did not mention any reduction in tariffs for imported autos, which typically exceed 100 per cent but are due to be reduced in stages as China prepares for entry into the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Plans to Divert Yangtze

One of the results of the worst drought in a decade is the decision to reconsider plans for the construction of a 1,200-kilometre canal to divert water from the Yangtze River basin to dry northern China. This South-to-North Water Transfer project was first proposed by Mao Zedong in 1952, but was shelved until re-examined by Chinese engineers in 1995.

The project involves three possible routes: a) an eastern path following the ancient Grand Canal north to the port of Tianjin; b) a middle path starting at the country’s largest reservoir, Danjiakou, which feeds a tributary of the Yangtze, and heading to Beijing; and c) a western path that would link the middle stretch of the Yangtze to the headwaters of the Yellow River.

All of these proposals will mean substantial upheaval for the populations in the areas finally chosen, and will raise questions about the environmental impacts of such a huge scheme. (MJ)