

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

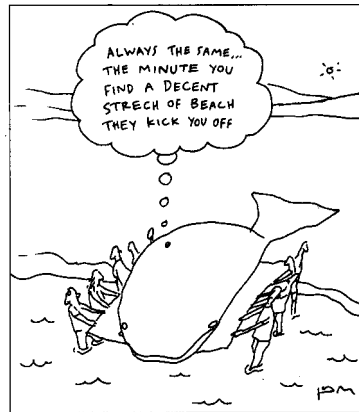
the US has barred foreign fishermen access to their exclusive economic zone (EEZ) for the past 12 years.

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)



Courtesy: The Observer

