

Dumped meat?

Mysterious start of JARPA II, the Japan's research whaling.

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In our No. 33 newsletter of January 2006, we estimated that "The amount of the whale meat from the Antarctic Ocean would be about 4,000 tons." The figure had been calculated based on the number of whales and "the meat amount" per whale in past research whaling.

However, the Institute of Cetacean Research (ICR) recently announced that the total amount of the whale meat in this season was 3,435.8 tons, of which the minke was 3168.7 tons, and the fin was 267.1 tons. Thus the minke was 500 tons lower than our estimation, 3,688t, which had been calculated based on annual data.

Usually, the average amount of the meat per minke is about 4.3 tons, but it was 3.7 tons in this season, decreased by nearly 600kg (14 %). Since nobody has talked about the possible shrinking of the whales, it looks as if some of the meat was dumped in the sea (!).

Did they want to reduce the stock buildup? Did they give up on maximizing "by-product" production because the number of allowable catch was doubled?

Or had they not enough space on the ship to bring back all the meat?

If any of these are true, it should have been expected when the number of whales for allowable catch was doubled. If so, the loss might be attributable to the Fishery Agency's poor preparation.

The news about the decision, that the number of whales allowed to be caught was doubled, created a sensation. But interestingly enough, little weight might have been attached on the responsibility that came along with the decision.

Fin whale sold at low price as minke In other news, "the research by-product" of the fin whale, the newly released whale meat, had high expectation from the industry early on. So we were interested in the price set by ICR, which was only 1,955 yen/kg, the same level as the minke and the Bryde's whales. Too cheap! It was no surprise that the fin meat got "sold out" immediately to distributors.

A fishery industry paper reported, "market price is rising sharply," so I investigated some retail shops wondering if the fin whale would appear. Then I found the suspicious one in an average supermarket. I believed it should be the fin, but it was labeled as "blue whale." (See the photos)

If it was in fact blue whale, the capture should have made headlines even if it was mistakenly caught in fixed net. Since there was no such news, I thought the label must have been a charming mistake. Anyway, I purchased the meat for "research" and tasted a bit of it.... It's an acquired taste, to

say the least, but the meat had stronger "odors" (unfavorable) than the minke I tried before. Uuuh. I can't tell whether it was because the meat was not fin whale, or if fin whale really tastes this bad.

Anybody can ask me to for the DNA test.

"Eat! Eat more!" says mass media

As the campaign runs, a popular TV program "Gogowa __ Omoikkiri TV" (Nippon Television 12:00~) picked up the topic of whale meat on

November 10th in "the Today's Story." This program is known for its great influence on consumers and sometimes causes sell-outs of items such as avocado and cocoa, if they are used on the show. The media have already devoted themselves in whale meat promotion under headlines such as "Whale comes back to school lunch" or "Whale price falls." The Whale Labo, the whale meat promotion company, has launched a new web site and the Government and mass media are working hard, hand in hand, to send this message to the public: Eat the whale, please. It smells of a kind of "petit nationalism."

But the achievement of the campaign is unpredictable. We will continue careful observation to see if the whale meat sales will increase as they expect.



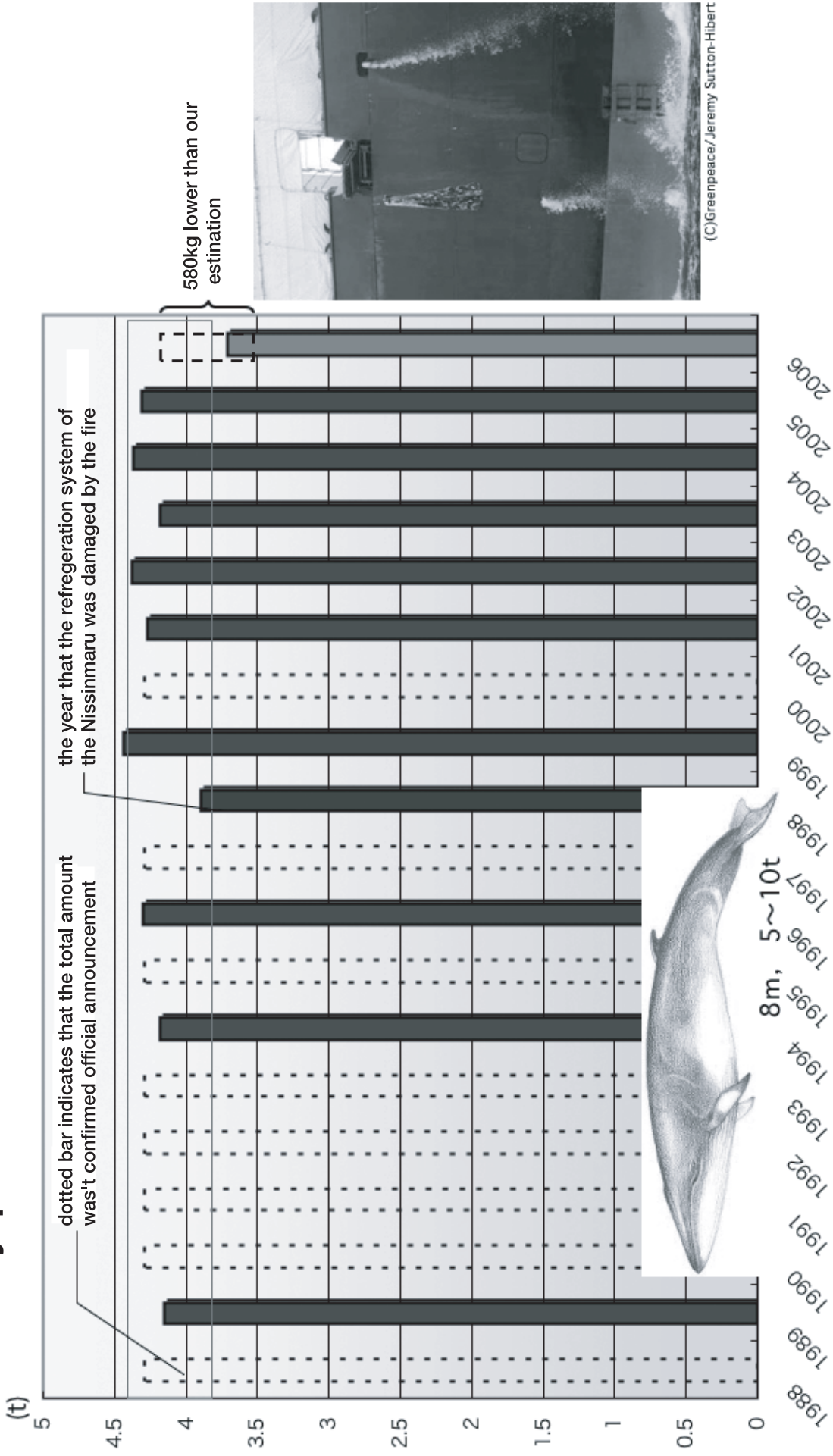
[Explanatory note for the chart.]

Each bar indicates the total amount of "research by-products" sold by ICR, divided by officially announced number of whales captured in the season. Figures were picked up from press releases, media reports and other sources.

Dotted bar indicates that the total amount wasn't confirmed by official announcement. So the height of the bar shows the average amount per whale, based on figures except 1998/1999 and 2005/2006.

The figure of 1998/99 was excluded because it was reported that the refrigeration system of the Nissinmaru was damaged by fire during the research.

"by-product" of the minke meat from JARPA



sources: the press releases from ICR & other media reports