

To: All press agencies, South Africa  
From: Peter Best

### **Whale Research Ship Coming to Cape Town**

The research ship, *Shonan Maru No.2* will arrive in Table Bay Harbour on 23 February 2007 after completing the 2006/2007 International Whaling Commission-Southern Ocean Whale and Ecosystem Research (IWC-SOWER) cruise. The 65-day research cruise in Antarctic waters started when the ship departed from Cape Town on 21 Dec 2006.

The research conducted during the cruise was part of a 29-year study of the whale populations of the Southern Ocean directed by the IWC's Scientific Committee, that has so far included three circumnavigations of the Antarctic continent. The ship was provided to the IWC by the Government of Japan and the research was conducted by a team of four scientists of three nationalities. Paul Ensor (New Zealand) is the cruise leader, with Paula Olson (USA), Kazuki Fukutome (Japan), and Isabel Beasley (New Zealand), completing the research team.

The research programme is unanimously supported by the 70 member nations of the Commission (including South Africa). The research does not involve the capture or killing of animals, and is conducted independently of any whaling operations.

Up until now, although collecting data for all species, the main focus of the cruises has been to obtain data to: (1) estimate the population size and distribution of Antarctic minke whales, primarily south of 60°S; and (2) develop an 'at sea' method to distinguish between the 'true' and 'pygmy' subspecies of blue whale.

The main objectives for the 2006/2007 cruise were to:

- (1) carry out a series of survey experiments designed to improve and interpret estimates of Antarctic minke whale abundance from previous cruises;
- (2) undertake fin whale research in waters north of 60°S, involving a sighting survey and biopsy sampling of the skin for genetic analyses;
- (3) continue research on blue whales (including collecting biopsy samples, acoustic data, photographs for identifying individual animals and behavioural data);
- (4) continue research on humpback whales, especially on stock structure (including collecting biopsy samples and individual identification photographs).

Observations of whales in the entire cruise included 125 blue, 59 fin, 272 humpback, 2176 minke, 30 sperm, 41 southern bottlenose whales and 80 killer whales. Skin samples for genetic analyses were collected from 72 blue whales, 15 fin whales and 72 humpback whales and 1 killer whale. Photos for identifying individuals included images of 114 blue whales and 160 humpback whales.

Results of the study will be presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Whaling Commission to be held in Alaska in May-June 2007.

For additional information, please see the IWC website (<http://www.iwcoffice.org>) or contact one of the following:

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