

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 17 December 2005 in preparation for the 2005/2006 International Whaling Commission-Southern Ocean Whale and Ecosystem Research (IWC-SOWER) cruise. On 20 December, the ship will depart for a 65-day research cruise in Antarctic waters.

The ship will conduct research as part of a 28-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 is being provided to the IWC by the Government of Japan and the research will be conducted by a team of four scientists of three nationalities. Paul Ensor (New Zealand) is the cruise leader, with Paula Olson (USA), Keiko Sekiguchi (Japan), and Kate Stafford (USA), completing the research team.

The research programme is unanimously supported by the 66 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 2005/2006 cruise are 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 a feasibility study for fin whale research in waters north of 60°S, involving a sighting survey, acoustic sampling and biopsy sampling of the skin for genetic analyses;
- (3) continue the 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).

The research will conclude on 22 February 2006, when the ship returns to Cape Town. Results of the study will be presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Whaling Commission to be held in St. Kitts and Nevis in May-June 2006.

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

Ken Findlay  
Oceanography Dept,  
University of Cape Town,  
Private Bag,  
Rondebosch 7700  
TEL (00 27) 21 7888476; Cell 0825708212  
EMAIL: [kenfin@cetus.co.za](mailto:kenfin@cetus.co.za)

Paul Ensor,  
Breakwater Lodge Hotel,  
Box 50683,  
Waterfront 8002  
TEL (00 27) 21 406 1911

IWC Secretariat  
The Red House  
135 Station Road  
Impington, Cambridge, CB4 9NP  
United Kingdom  
TEL: +44 1223 233971  
FAX: +44 1223 232876  
EMAIL: [secretariat@iwcoffice.org](mailto:secretariat@iwcoffice.org)