



23 December 2020

**IOTC CIRCULAR  
2020-52**

Dear Madam / Sir

**A COMMUNICATION FROM JAPAN REGARDING A FORBES ARTICLE**

Please find attached a communication from Japan regarding a Forbes article on Japan and its fishing vessels.

Yours sincerely

Christopher O'Brien  
Executive Secretary

**Attachments:**

1. Letter from Japan

Distribution

**IOTC Contracting Parties:** Australia, Bangladesh, China, Comoros, Eritrea, European Union, France (Territories), India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Rep of), Japan, Kenya, Rep. of Korea, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Pakistan, Philippines, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, United Rep. of Tanzania, Thailand, United Kingdom ("BIOT"), Yemen. **Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties:** Liberia, Senegal. **Intergovernmental Organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations. Chairperson IOTC. Copy to:** FAO Headquarters, FAO Representatives to CPCs.

This message has been transmitted by email only

Attachment 1. Letter from Japan



FISHERIES AGENCY

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHERIES, GOVERNMENT OF JAPAN

1-2-1, Kasumigaseki, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-8907, Japan

TEL: \*81-3-3591-1086 FAX: \*81-3-3591-5824

22 December 2020

Dr. Christopher O'Brien,  
IOTC Executive Secretary

Dear Dr. O'Brien,

**Forbes' article "Japan Vs Nature: Satellites Reveal Japan's Mauritius Base For Africa Fishing Operations" (by Mr. Nishan Degnarain )**

The said article posted on Forbes on 14 December 2020 includes a number of factual errors and groundless criticism in relation to Japan's fishing operations in the Indian Ocean. It also contains unreasonable assertive connections between different issues. Accordingly, Japan requested correction of the article as attached.

Please circulate this letter to all CPCs.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shingo Ota', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Shingo Ota

Japan's Commissioner to IOTC



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22 December 2020

To the Editor,

**Mr. Nishan Degnarain's article "Japan Vs Nature: Satellites Reveal Japan's Mauritius Base For Africa Fishing Operations" (December 14, 2020)**

I am writing to you on the said article, which includes a number of factual errors and groundless criticism. It also contains unreasonable assertive connections between different issues. While authors have the right to criticize governments, such criticism should be based on solid facts in order for constructive dialogue to take place. I am particularly concerned that this article containing such errors might spread an unduly negative image of Japan and its fishing vessels to the public. Accordingly, I would like to request correction of the serious factual errors in the article, as per the facts attached.

As the Fisheries Agency is responsible for fisheries, the fact sheet attached is concerning fisheries. Moreover, we are not in a position to make comments on the activities of private companies mentioned in the article.

Please note that the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) and the Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement (SIOFA), regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) which are in charge of fisheries in the Indian Ocean, will receive a copy of this letter so that members of these organizations will not be misled by the article.

I hope that you will take our request seriously.

Sincerely yours,

Shingo Ota

Director-General for International Fisheries

Fisheries Agency of Japan

(Attachment)

Points in the article	FAJ's response
<p><i>"The rise in Japan's operations across the Indian Ocean is particularly sensitive..."</i></p> <p><i>"Seeing the rapid rise of Japan's industrial fishing operations in the Indian Ocean raises significant conflicts of interest..."</i></p>	<p>Japan's industrial fishing operations have been decreasing drastically rather than rising in the Indian Ocean.</p> <p>(Fishing operation in IOTC area)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ The number of Japanese fishing vessels operating in the IOTC area has decreased from 192 vessels in 2000 to about 40-50 in recent years.</li><li>➤ Accordingly, Japan's total catch of three major tuna species (Bigeye, Yellowfin and Skipjack) in the IOTC area in 2019 accounts for only 0.6% of the total catch by all the IOTC members.</li></ul> <p>(Fishing operation in SIOFA area)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ The number of Japanese fishing vessels operating in the SIOFA area has stayed within 3 since 2000.</li><li>➤ In 2019, Japan's catch accounts for only 11.7% of the total catch by all the SIOFA members.</li></ul>
<p><i>"Both Japan and the EU (particularly, Spain), have been singled out for not accurately reporting their industrial fishing activities across the Indian..."</i></p>	<p>Japan has been providing its data in accordance with relevant rules of regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs). Scientific committees of RFMOs have been using Japanese catch data for stock assessment as a reliable source.</p>
<p><i>"The rapid escalation in Japan's fisheries operations in the Indian Ocean comes as major U.K. brands like Tesco and Princes announced a significant reduction of tuna sourcing from the Indian Ocean in October, to allow overfished tuna stocks to recover..."</i></p>	<p>The background behind the boycott activities in tuna procurement by UK companies is that the IOTC has not introduced effective conservation and management measures for those three major tuna species. Japan's fishing operations in the IOTC area have substantially shrunk as above, and there is no reason to single out Japan.</p>
<p><i>"there was a 1000% jump in the number of Japanese fishing operations launched from Mauritius. Japanese flagged vessels now account for the vast majority of large-scale industrial fishing operations launched from Mauritius..."</i></p>	<p>In some years during 2000-2010, more than 20 Japanese fishing vessels operated in the Mauritian waters. However, the number has stayed within 1-3 vessels in the last five years and the annual catch is approximately 100 tons only. Such assertion lacks a basis.</p> <p>Entrance to foreign ports is an internationally common practice by fishing vessels flagged to many distant-water fishing states. Besides, fishing vessels uses ports facilities and receive supplies of goods (e.g. oil and food), thereby substantially contribute to the regional economy.</p>
<p><i>"Japan opted out of international whaling convention"</i></p>	<p>Japanese vessels have never conducted any whaling activities in the Indian Ocean since its designation as "TWC Indian Ocean Whale Sanctuary", and have no plan of whaling there at all. Therefore, it is totally inappropriate to link Japan's fishing activities in the Indian Ocean to Japan's whaling or to its withdrawal from</p>

	<p>the IWC.</p> <p>The article further links stranded whales and dolphins to fishing activities. However, there is no scientific evidence in support of such linkage, and it is also inappropriate to mention it based on incomplete speculation. Moreover, given the small presence of Japan's fishing vessels in the Indian Ocean, it is unfair to highlight Japan's fishing vessels in a negative manner.</p>
<p><i>"According to EU ship safety database, EQUASIS, the Taiyo Maru No 88 has never been inspected..."</i></p> <p><i>"Shofuku Maru No 38...From the EU's ship safety database, EQUASIS, there is no record of any external inspection of the vessel"</i></p>	<p>These vessels have been properly inspected in Japan in accordance with its relevant domestic regulations as well as with relevant international laws.</p>
<p><i>"The fishing patterns of six of Japan's seven vessels can be clearly tracked. The seventh vessel - a giant factory trawler called Tomi Maru No 58 appears to be fishing in the dark, which would be illegal for a 68 meter long vessel (AIS is compulsory for vessels longer than 25meters or larger than 300 tons to avoid collisions at sea). This is particularly concerning as this giant industrial fishing vessel had previously been impounded in Russia for being caught conducting illegal fishing activities in a case that went to the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea in 2007."</i></p>	<p>Tomi Maru No. 58 has properly implemented the position reporting in accordance with relevant rules of SIOFA. The vessel is properly equipped with AIS. Under the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), fishing vessels are allowed to switch off the AIS during fishing operations.</p> <p>Reference to the ITLOS case in 2007 is incorrect. The vessel previously impounded by Russia was Tomi Maru No. 53, not No. 58 which is owned by a different company.</p> <p>In addition, this vessel (401 tons) is not gigantic at all compared to European super trawlers whose gross tonnage sometimes exceed 10,000 tons.</p>
<p><i>"No 2 Yushin Maru that conducted unspecified 'research' operations along the Indian Ocean down to Antarctica (as seen in satellite analysis by Windward). This research does not appear to have been disclosed publicly, nor are the areas in which this research took place."</i></p>	<p>Activities of Yushin Maru No. 2 are genuinely scientific ones under a Japanese research program, which was endorsed by the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission (IWC). The results and achievements of the research have been reported to the IWC Scientific Committee, receiving their high appreciation. Their outlines are publicly available in the websites of IWC<sup>*1</sup>, FAJ<sup>*2</sup> and the Institute of Cetacean Research (ICR)<sup>*3</sup>.</p>

\*1: [https://archive.iwc.int/pages/view.php?search=%21collection29928%&k=&modal=&display=list&order\\_by=title&offset=0&per\\_page=240&archive=&sort=DESC&restypes=&recentdaylimit=&foredit=&ref=17142](https://archive.iwc.int/pages/view.php?search=%21collection29928%&k=&modal=&display=list&order_by=title&offset=0&per_page=240&archive=&sort=DESC&restypes=&recentdaylimit=&foredit=&ref=17142)

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<https://archive.iwc.int/pages/search.php?search=%21collection73&k=#>

\*2: [http://www.ifa.naff.go.jp/i/whale/w\\_whatnow/index.html](http://www.ifa.naff.go.jp/i/whale/w_whatnow/index.html)

\*3: <http://icrwhale.org/20120@releaseENG.html>