Letter To Japanese Whaling Companies: Opinion Essay

Point of View

In 2014 when I was a year 5 student at the Australian International School of Singapore, I became very invested in the well-being of animals. I think that all kids do though. We all say we want to be vegetarian and to stop killing animals. We all present posters to our class convincing our audience that we shouldn’t support animal testing or the live export of animals. We raise money, donate to organisations and convince our parents to 'adopt' rhinos and elephants. No kid wants to think they're contributing to a murder. If this is the mindset we grow up to have, then why will whales become extinct in the year 2045?

Over 500 species have vanished in the last century due to our destruction of their natural habitat. Whales however do not fall into this extinct species category for now. Whaling used to be extremely common throughout the 19th and 20th century, it happened so often that they almost became extinct. Fishermen found more effective methods of whaling and the demand for whale meat rose. In response, the International Whaling Commission placed a ban on it in 1986. 70 years later, we still don't know if the original whale count has been recovered. There is no evidence of recover in areas such as Oceania where the population count is 2000. Even the entire Southern Hemisphere only adds up to 60 000. Now you want to resume the mass murder of them. What happened to our childish values that made the world a better place?

We have been killing on average, 16 000 whales for the past 83 consecutive years. Not only do we kill them directly for food and resource but indirectly in events such as ship strikes, fishery entanglement and military seismic blasting. One study shows that 80 whales are killed by ship collisions every year. A ship and whale collision can result in a dead or injured whale as well as a damaged ship and sometimes injury to those aboard the ship. I don’t think that this scenario is what anyone needs. On top of ship strikes, we are also abolishing whales more and more by industrial developments, destroying their habitats, and filling the ocean with noise. In relation to destroying a whales' habitat, oceans are becoming more polluted each day as plastic and nets are distributed across the seas. When a whale swims into a net or fishing line, they can quickly become entangled. Like humans, they breathe air so have limited time to escape. If they cannot surface quickly enough, they suffocate. In their desperation to escape, some tear muscles, break teeth, and sheer off fins. But the more they struggle, the more entangled they can become. This is the cause of fishery entanglement and ocean pollution destroying habitats. Seismic blasting is an oil exploration mechanism and threat to whales. Not only does seismic blasting encourage oil drills which can lead to oil spills, but it can affect whales in numerous ways. To name a few: Hearing loss, Freeze and Sink response, Ice entrapment, stopping whale songs, and stress.

I am only repeating the message that should be loud and clear to you. You are ruining the planet. Maybe you have forgotten that your actions have impacts. An impact that will leave this world with unhealthy oceans and a large abundance of krill. Whales help regulate the flow of food in an ecosystem. Being the top of the food chain, whales help maintain this flow, ensuring certain animals do not become overpopulated. This creates a balance in the marine ecosystem. They excrete nutrients in the form of nitrogen-rich faecal matter that is essential to the primary

production of the marine ecosystem. Do you get it yet?

As much damage as we humans cause, we are also part of this ecosystem and food chain. You seem to understand this well when you say its Japanese Tradition to eat whale. Is it also Japanese Tradition to give people birth defects? Whales are particularly vulnerable to environmental contaminants including polychlorinated biphenyl and heavy metals such as mercury. In the 1950s and 60s, back when whaling had been extremely popular in Japan, hundreds of Japanese children around the Minamata Bay were born with shocking birth defects. This was due to the whale meat which was in fact contaminated with mercury compounds. Many people had suffered brain damage at this time. The whale liver on average contained 370 micrograms per gram of mercury. This is 900 times the government limit. Average levels in the lungs and kidneys were also high, about 100 times the limit. The contaminants are often highly concentrated in blubber because they are lipophilic, meaning they bond easily and even preferentially to fat. Whales no longer live in a pristine environment; we have polluted their habitat with poisons that concentrate in their tissues. Regardless of the amount, the consumption of whale meat can expose humans to dangerous contaminants.

If I haven't convinced you of the environmental and health risks of this procedure maybe informing you that whaling isn't what the Japanese economy needs will. Not only has the demand for whale meat decreased drastically but whale watching has proven better for the Japanese economy. One study showed that 65% of Japanese people haven't even had whale meat and if they did it was in their early childhood. Whale meat isn't even in supermarkets in Japan. Motoji Nagasawa, Greenpeace's whale campaigner in Japan, said: 'The government has been spending a lot of money spreading misinformation that whaling is an important national interest, and all Japanese want it. Now to help you save millions of dollars which would be wasted ruining the ecosystem, why don’t you invest in whale watching. Whale watching has become an extremely popular activity for tourists. In 2010, whale watching's economic contribution was estimated at $16.4 million. If your aim is to improve Japanese economy through whaling, then you’ve got it wrong.