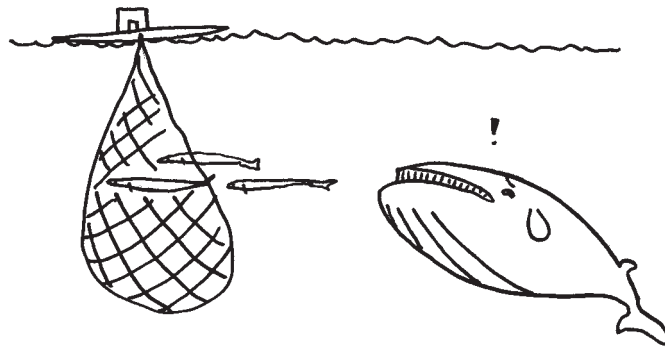


"Whales are eating up all the fish" ?

-- No way!!

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1. Is Pacific saury in decline?

At the 58th Annual Meeting of International Whaling Commission, Joji Morishita, the alternative delegate for Japan, who is also the Fisheries Negotiator of the Fisheries Agency International Department, said the following:

Since around the time the ban on commercial whaling was imposed, the total catch of the Japanese fisheries has been decreasing. It can then be surmised that there is a connection between our poor haul and the ban on whaling and the consequent increase of food consumption of whales. (Unofficial translation)

In this statement he is painting a very simplistic view: that unless we hunt these whales they will multiply and threaten our marine resources.

The Japanese government has also showed footage of minke whales eating pacific saury right beside saury fishing boats. This may have convinced some people that whales were indeed the cause for our poor haul of Pacific saury. However, the reality is not so simple.

According to the survey carried out by the National Pacific Saury Association on Pacific saury catches, even though even though the catch in recent years (1999 and 2000) has dropped to less than 200 thousand tons, it bounced back up to 200 thousand to 600 thousand after that. Let's not be mistaken, catching this amount of saury is a good haul. During this peak catch, a Pacific saury was sold in stores for less than 100 yen (100yen is a little less than \$1US).

The main fishing grounds for Pacific saury extend from Boso peninsula of Chiba Prefecture in the south to the Chishima islands of Hokkaido in the north, extending along the coast into the far sea. More large schools of Pacific saury can be found in the far sea, but are untouched, as the saury fisheries abide by the quota set by the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) System, which came into effect in 1997.

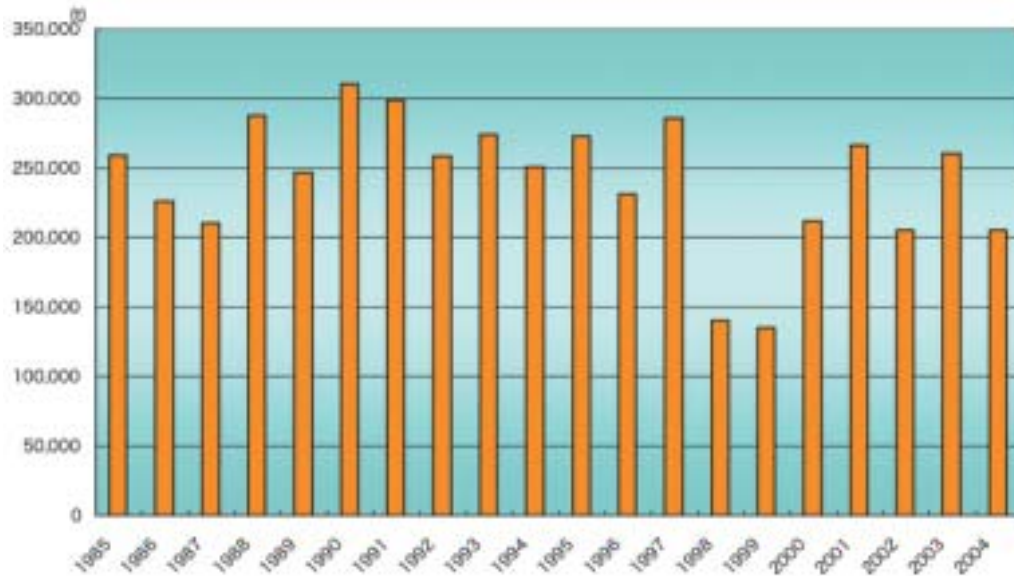
This system was introduced to set the upper catch limit to ensure a sustainable use of marine resources, but it has another role for the Pacific saury catch. If the fishermen were to catch more than this limit that would cause a " Good haul to go poor : " meaning the lowering of income due to the lowering of the fish price as a result of the huge increase in supply. So, in a year of a heavy haul, once the stockrooms on the ships are filled they return to the harbor and take a " 24 hour rest period " or " 48 hour rest period, " without heading to the fish market straight away with their catch. The rest period is there to control the supply level, and is directed by the fishing industry.

In short, the saury catch hasn't declined since the installment of the ban on commercial whaling. The National Pacific Saury Association in fact applies the theory given by the Fisheries Research Agency (NPO) (Tohoku National Fisheries Research Institute, Hachinohe Branch Resource Ecology Research Division) that stated that the saury population was entering the " resource fluctuation period " (For more about this, refer to: <http://www.samma.jp/sanma.htm>)

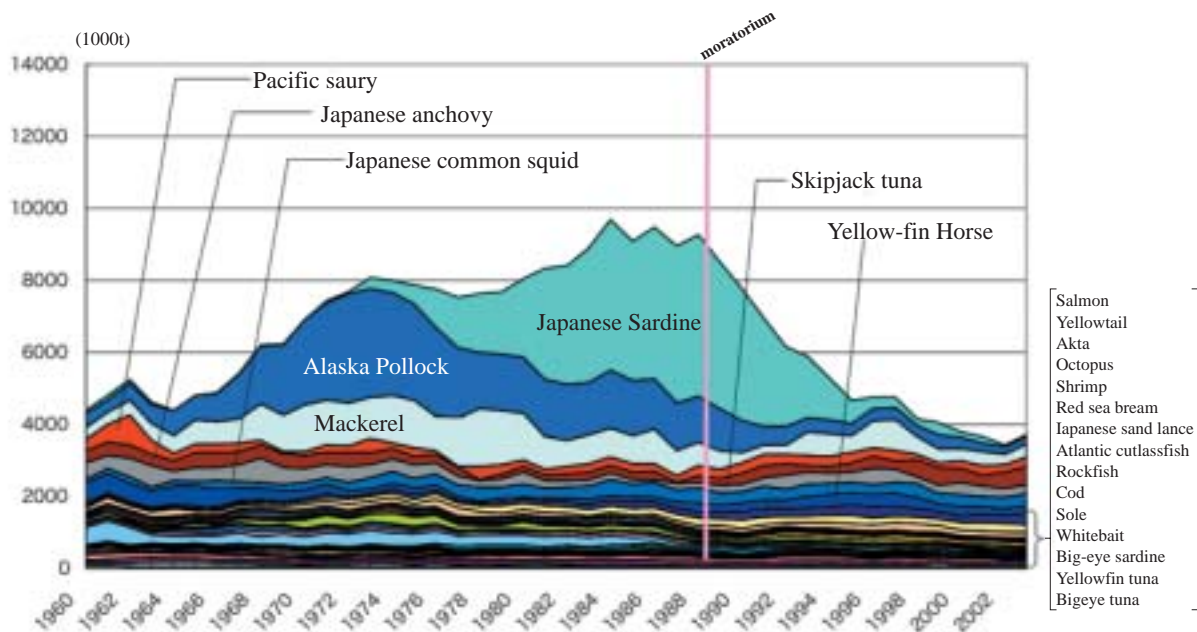
Of course it is not to say that minke whales are not causing fishermen any trouble at all. To name a few, the damaging of tools, bruising of fish obliging the fishermen to be more careful in the selection of their products, and the maneuvering of vessels around whales does amount to a reasonable annoyance. However, could the resumption of commercial whaling really solve these problems? That seems a little unrealistic as well as extreme. It is more sensible to come up with countermeasures such as developing whale deterrent technology. As a last result, similar to how it is done with terrestrial wildlife management, some " problem whales " may be considered for " eradication, " but not without exhausting preventative countermeasures first. The reopening of a commercial whaling as a cure for the saury-whale conflict (if that exists) is too farfetched and unreasonable.

* Refer to figure 1: Annual haul of Pacific saury.

1. Annual haul of Pacific saury



2. Domestic production of major seafood groups and Japanese sardine resources



2. Domestic production of major seafood groups and Japanese sardine resources

How did the Japanese government reach the conclusion that whales were in fact one big factor for the decline of fish resources? We investigated this case with government statistics and data published from the Fisheries Agency's research facility, Fisheries Research Agency (NPO).

To begin, please refer to figure 2: Domestic production of major seafood groups and Japanese sardine resources. This figure depicts the change in the amount of fish hauled by the Japanese fisheries. It does not include any imports, but because it includes all Japanese-registered vessels, some harvests outside of Japanese waters are also included.

The total catch in recent years are now below 10million tons. The pink vertical line labels the year the moratorium was put into place.

According to this graph, the Japanese sardine and Alaskan Pollock constitute a large portion of the domestic catch, and following them are mackerels, soles, yellow-fin horse mackerel, Japanese anchovy and Japanese common squid. Others, consisting of over 10 species, make up for 1700 to 1800 tons caught annually. What else is shown here is that

Alaskan Pollock started to decline around 1972, and Japanese sardine started to decline around 1988. Overall, the total decline of fish catch can be attributed to the decline in the Japanese sardine catch.

The established theory for the decline of the sardine catch, however, is not about over-fishing, not about whales, but is a natural phenomenon. What is now known as “Species Replacement” occurs for mass-caught fish species, such as sardines and mackerels, where populations fluctuate drastically over a 3 to 10 year cycle. (For more about this see: Prefecture of Kanagawa Fisheries and Fisheries General Research Center <http://www.agri.pref.kanagawa.jp/suisoken/Sakana/Misc/Maiwasi/#chap-5> National Reserch institute of Fisheries science, Fisheries Research Agency Kuroshio and Ecology Research

Therefore, interpreting the mere overlapping years for the sardine decline and the start of moratorium seems to be a little imperceptive of a theory.

Furthermore, what is preventing Japanese sardines from recovering is not whales but very likely the fishing industry. When Japanese sardines were abundant, the quota was set to 20% of the known population, and when the stock became deprived, people kept catching the sardines with the new quota set at 60% of a population that was already shrinking. As one can expect, Kawai (2003) reported that this heavy fishing pressure on the population was hindering the recovery of the sardine.

It is also notable that most of the Japanese sardine caught during the peak years was processed for animal feed, and was not put towards human consumption. (Refer to Figure 3: Fish and shellfish production) More and more Japan is leaning towards imports for the long-term supply of seafood, and it seems clear that the amount of Japanese sardine for consumption is virtually unaffected by the decline in the sardine catch.

Considering the factors above, one can surmise that it is unlikely that “the ban on commercial whaling had caused the decrease of fish.” This is not to say that there is no relationship at all. However, just to pursue this possibility (that there exists a competition between fisheries and whales), which is very unlikely but not zero, the Japanese government is continuing and expanding scientific whaling in the Northwest Pacific Ocean. Seeing such vigor and persistence for continued whaling on such a weak platform, it is hard to argue with those who criticize the government for “prioritizing obtaining whale meat for sale, over science” and “scientific whaling is only a disguise for continuing whaling.”

3. Fish and shellfish production

