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12958: DECL: 2020/01/08 TAGS: EFIS, SENV, EWWT, NZ, JA, AS SUBJEC
T: Japanese Whaling Vessel Collision With Sea Sheperd Boat -New Z
ealand's Perspective REF: CANBERRA 000014 CLASSIFIED BY: Peter G
Tinsley, Acting Deputy Chief of Mission, State, Political/Economic Affair
s; REASON: 1.4(B), (D) 1

(SBU) On January 7, Econoff spoke with Ministry of Foreign Affairs and T
rade (MFAT) Environmental Division Deputy Director Carol Schwalger, who
is the chief point of contact on the January 6 collision between a Japan
ese whaling vessel and the Ady Gil, a boat owned by the Sea Sheperd Cons
ervation Society anti-whaling group

Schwalger said that the New Zealand Government (GNZ) is not making any judg
ment as to who was at fault for the collision, regardless of the public acc
usations and finger pointing in the press that both sides in the incident a
re currently engaged in

Since the Ady Gil is a New Zealand flagged vessel, the New Zealand Govern
ment has undertaken a preliminary assessment and investigation before dec
iding on next steps

Schwalger noted that MFAT has had an exchange with Japan regarding the ma
tter, and Japan has promised to do a full investigation

According to MFAT's preliminary judgment, it is not clear which party is at
fault

Schwalger added that the New Zealand Government is not under the same pub
lic pressure to respond as the Australian Government since the whaling is

sue is a "much hotter" issue there

She did note, however, that depending how the investigation goes, there could be "diplomatic consequences." 2

(SBU) During a January 7 interview on Radio NZ - the national radio station - Foreign Minister Murray McCully reiterated New Zealand's opposition to Japanese whaling operations in Antarctic waters but called on all parties to "put a greater premium on life, in such a harsh environment." He added that Maritime New Zealand was conducting the preliminary assessment in close cooperation with Australian maritime authorities (Note: The collision took place in an area where Australia is responsible for maritime search and rescue operations

End Note)

McCully said that the GNZ would decide on appropriate next steps following completion of the preliminary assessment

In the interim, McCully noted, he would be taking the matter up with the Japanese on January 7 and, "despite our strongly differing views on the whaling issue, that we do work constructively with the Japanese authorities, because we have issues of safety and welfare at stake, and I've found that the Japanese Government and New Zealand Government can work together, despite our differences over the whaling policy issue."

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(C) Comment: The Government of New Zealand's measured response and unwillingness to rush to assign blame for the collision between a Japanese whaling vessel and the New Zealand-flagged Ady Gil are in vivid contrast to the more sensationalistic coverage of the incident in the New Zealand press. Both sides are using the press to take their case to the court of public opinion and assign blame for the incident to the other party.

While the whaling issue may not resonate as strongly with Kiwis as it does with Australians, most Kiwis support their Government's strong opposition to Japanese whaling in Antarctic waters.

Whether that will sway public opinion against the Japanese on this particular incident remains to be seen.

In the mean time, the Japanese Government-backed Institute of Cetacean Research has made New Zealander Glenn Inwood its spokesman on this issue and he has been vigorously defending the actions of the Japanese vessel, the Shonan Maru 2, in the New Zealand print and broadcast media.

End Comment