

Ady Gil sinks after whaling skirmish

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The Sea Shepherd's anti-whaling speedboat Ady Gil has sunk after it was sliced in two by a Japanese whaling vessel during a clash in the Southern Ocean on Wednesday.

Sea Shepherd founder Paul Watson told ABC News Breakfast the Ady Gil went down shortly before 3:30am AEDT while it was being towed to a French research base by the group's Bob Barker boat.

"I think they were towing for about six or seven hours," he said.

"Even the act of towing was taking more water on. The Japanese vessel had cut the vessel completely in half and made it unseaworthy."

Six Sea Shepherd crew members were almost thrown overboard and one crew member suffered broken ribs when the Japanese whaling security ship, the Shonan Maru 2, ploughed through the bow of the high-tech Ady Gil on Wednesday.

Both the Japanese whalers and the Sea Shepherd crew blame each other for the incident, which happened in Antarctic waters.

But Mr Watson has defended his crew and says the risk of dying on the high seas is worth it if it allows the group to save whales.

"My crew are well aware of the risks that we have to take to protect whales down here. I think those risks are worth taking," he said.

"I can tell you now that if the oceans die, civilisations collapse and we all die.

"People die everyday to protect oil wells and real estate and we call them heroes and pin medals on them. I think protecting the diversity of oceans... is a far more noble cause."

'Harassment and attack'

But Glenn Inwood from Japan's Institute of Cetacean Research says Mr Watson has a dangerous attitude.

"Paul Watson has said before that he's willing to give any Japanese vessel what he calls a steel enema by ramming his ship into the stern of any Japanese vessel," Mr Inwood said.

"He also proudly displays the number of vessels he's sunk on the side of the Steve Irwin.

"You can understand why the Japanese have put security vessels down there.

"To say Japan has broken maritime laws can't be justified in this instance when you're under constant harassment and constant attack from these ships."

Mr Inwood says Japan's whaling program is internationally recognised as legal.



Damaged: the Sea Shepherd's Ady Gil came off worst in the collision (Sea Shepherd: Joanne McArthur)

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- [Video: Gillard speaks on the Ady Gil collision \(ABC News\)](#)
- [Video: Ady Gil blame game continues \(7pm TV News NSW\)](#)
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"The International Whaling Commission (IWC) have sanctioned it. The New Zealand government recognises its legality, and many members of the IWC do as well," he said.

"Sea Shepherd is trying to prevent Japan from conducting what is a legal operation under the rules of the IWC."

Yesterday Acting Prime Minister Julia Gillard asked the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) to investigate the incident and said the findings would be made public.

She says the Government reserves the right to take international legal action if diplomacy with Japanese officials fails, and has warned that evidence has already been collected to launch such action.

New Zealand is also investigating the incident because the Ady Gil was registered there.

'An act of war'

Mr Watson says an insurance payout on the Ady Gil is unlikely because the incident was a deliberate act.

"It's a \$1.5 million loss for our organisation," he said.

"I think the Japanese deliberately took that vessel out; they saw it as a threat and they were under orders to take it out.

"It would be an act of war so there wouldn't be any insurance on it."

Mr Watson says two Japanese harpoon ships were nearby but did not offer any help after the incident.

"They were responsible, they destroyed the vessel ... I think they should have offered some sort of assistance but they refused to acknowledge any distress signal," he said.

Mr Watson says they were able to remove all the fuel from the speedboat to prevent any pollution.

Mr Watson is urging the Federal Government to take a tougher action against Japanese whalers.

"In the six years that we've been doing this, we've never caused an injury to anyone, we've never broken a law... and now they have sunk one of our vessels," he said.

"[Federal Environment Minister] Peter Garrett has become the master of restraint. He made a campaign promise to end whaling; now let's see him [do something]."

Mr Watson says the Government should send a boat to Antarctic waters, where the Sea Shepherd's other boats - the Steve Irwin and Bob Barker - are continuing to pursue Japanese whalers.

Mr Watson says the boats are chasing the Japanese fleet and the whalers have not killed a whale in two days.

Diplomatic approach

Meanwhile, New Zealand officials have met with representatives from the Japanese embassy in Wellington to discuss the situation.

The ABC understands that at the Wellington meeting, Japan said it regarded the incident as "regrettable" but a "low-key event".

This morning a spokesman for the New Zealand Foreign Minister, Murray McCully, said contrary to media reports, Japan had not lodged a stern complaint with the New Zealand Government.

He said Japanese officials agreed with New Zealand that their citizens needed to have better regard for people on the high seas.

The spokesman said legal action over the collision had not been discussed, because it still had not been established who was at fault.

Maritime New Zealand has launched an investigation.

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