

From The Times

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Whalers attacked us with 'sound guns' claim conservationists



(Kate Davison/EPA)

Japan continues to hunt whales every year in the guise of scientific research

Richard Lloyd Parry in Tokyo

Radical environmentalists accused Japanese whalers of attacking them with high-tech "sound guns" in the latest round of their annual stand-off in the frozen seas off the Antarctic.

The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society said that crew members of the whaler *Nisshin Maru* used the Long Range Acoustic Device (LRAD) against rubber launches attempting to disrupt their yearly hunt in the Southern Ocean. The devices can cause nausea, disorientation and hearing damage.

The LRAD is a nonlethal weapon used for crowd control by security forces, as well as by ships travelling through pirate-infested waters. It consists of a round disc that directs a beam of shrill sound, extremely loud and off-putting at a range of several hundred yards, and capable of causing permanent ear damage at close range.

"This is a military-grade weapon system that sends out mid to high-frequency sound waves designed to disorient and possibly incapacitate personnel," Sea Shepherd said in a statement. The self-styled environmental "pirates" said that two of its members were slightly injured by the Japanese sailors, who also fired water hoses and threw metal balls at them as they tried to obstruct the launch of a smaller harpoon boat from the *Nisshin Maru*.

Sea Shepherd's confrontational and sometimes violent tactics are opposed even by those who denounce Japan's whaling programme, including Greenpeace and the governments of Australia and New Zealand.

The Japanese Government's Fisheries Agency admitted that "beeping warning tones" had been used against the environmentalists.

The hunting of whales was banned in 1986 by the International Whaling Commission after evidence that the world's largest mammals were being driven towards extinction. Japan continues to hunt whales every year in the guise of scientific research, although most of the 935 minke and 50 fin whales that it hopes to harvest this year will be sold as whale meat.

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