



A Sea Shepherd hurls a bottle of butyric acid at a Japanese ship, the Yushin Maru No. 1 (photo by guano on Flickr)

Earlier today, [Sea Shepherd Conservation Society](#), an anti-whaling activist group—and the only environmental group with its own reality television series—petitioned the nation’s highest court.

In its petition to the U.S. Supreme Court, Sea Shepherd seeks review of a [December 17, 2012 injunction](#) from Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Alex Kozinski that prevents the Sea Shepherds from “physically attacking any vessel engaged by the plaintiffs,” Japan’s Institute of Cetacean Research, and requires the Sea Shepherds to remain at least 500 yards away the Institute’s vessels. In addition, the order prevents Sea Shepherds from “navigating in a manner that is likely to endanger the safe navigation” of the Institute’s vessels. Sea Shepherd [challenges the enforceability of the injunction](#), as it purports to apply to a fleet of ships registered in Australia and the Netherlands as the fleet sails in international waters.

Sea Shepherd is a non-profit marine conservation organization established in 1977 by [Captain Paul Watson](#), Co-Founding Director of Greenpeace, “[to end the destruction of habitat and slaughter of wildlife in the world’s oceans in order to conserve and protect ecosystems and species.](#)” *Sea Shepherd* was also the name of the group’s first ship. According to the group’s [mission statement](#), they use “innovative direct-action tactics” to “expose and confront illegal activities on the high seas.” Anyone who has watched the Animal Planet series [Whale Wars](#), which follows the Sea Shepherds’ annual winter voyage to the Southern Ocean to thwart Japanese whaling ships, has seen the group use “direct-action tactics” like throwing bottles of acid onto whale-pursuing vessels, targeted collisions, forcibly boarding vessels at sea, seizing drift nets, and fouling props. Sea Shepherd is famously supported by celebrities including the [Red Hot Chili Peppers](#), [Bob Barker](#), [Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.](#), and the late crocodile hunter [Steve Irwin](#).

In particular, the Sea Shepherds focus on protecting the [International Whaling Commission](#)-designated [whale sanctuary](#) in the Southern Ocean around Antarctica. Despite the [international moratorium on commercial whaling](#) that has been in place for over 20 years, Japan still catches and kills about 1000 whales per year in what the Japanese government [describes](#) as a “scientific research program.” (Iceland and Norway, members of the International Whaling Commission, also take whales commercially under objection or reservation to the moratorium, and report their catch information to the Commission.) In

total, [Japan has killed over 14,000 whales](#) since the moratorium took effect.

Coincidentally, just last week, the New York Times ran an [article](#) describing a recent [International Fund for Animal Welfare report](#) about Japan's whaling industry. The report states that Japan has artificially supported its whaling industry with nearly \$400 million in public subsidies over the past few years, even as whale meat consumption has declined. The article further reports, according to the Institute of Cetacean Research's own data, that income from the sale of whale meat has failed to cover whaling costs for the past five years.