



Whaler chaser off Mertz Glacier. Japan, Norway and other countries are killing whales every year commercially for domestic and export consumption so... stop eating whale meat!

# WHALE WARS

Our seasoned deep-south sailor is caught in the thick of the whaling wars in Antarctica

Permits to do anything are a fact of life these days and Antarctica tops the list if you want to sail south in a yacht or ship. I have sailed there virtually every season since 1993. But it is not an easy place to get to, beyond the Furious Fifties and Screaming Sixties, travelling to Antarctica. Still, it is a right of passage that everyone, from early explorers to modern-day adventurers, should endure. You enter the realms of what is effectively another planet, a land of ice and pristine harmony, the last great

wilderness on earth and the only continent where man does not belong and where the human race has not evolved. That is Antarctica.

Over the past five years, I have been leading voyages to Antarctica with 100 passengers onboard the five-star Expedition ship *MV Orion*. Marble bathrooms, fine dining and 24-hour room service are a far cry from my first visit onboard *Buttercup*, my 50ft solo around-the-world racing yacht, with 200 teddy bears in tow.

The experience for the guests onboard *Orion* is life changing. We make landings in the most amazing places and see things that you cannot see in the books and documentaries. Antarctica is bigger than that and you simply have to be there to appreciate it.

I believe in Antarctic tourism because every visitor becomes an ambassador and in the long-term will become the only voice fighting for its survival against mining and all those other things we do to use up this world. And that

includes whales...

Our permits provided by the Australian Antarctic Division to visit Antarctica ensure we have a less than negligible impact on the environment. They also require us to report all shipping activity we encounter, in case we come across any illegal or unregulated fishing activity. A year before, we actually did report an illegal fishing vessel that was ultimately apprehended and prosecuted.

In January this year, we were ship-cruising the tip of the Mertz Glacier, which extends 40nm out to sea from the Antarctic Continent. There was brilliant sunshine and it highlighted the fields of floating pack ice and giant 'bergs' surrounding the glacier, painting a picture that became a magnet.

I asked the Captain to stop the ship and we set off in Zodiacs to cruise among it, listening to the silence and talking to the crab-eater seals, the Adelie and emperor penguins resting on the ice, as snow

petrels flew beside us. Even by Antarctic standards it was a big day.

That evening, the dining room chatter was elevated. Everyone was on a high. In the middle of it, the captain informed me there was a ship up front about 45

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minutes out, so I finished dinner then wandered up to the bridge.

## CAUGHT IN THE ACT

When I opened the door into the bridge and looked out, a tingle ran through my spine. I felt like the American admiral who had just come across the Japanese battle fleet! There they were — the Japanese whaling fleet! Just a few miles away.

For a moment I was lost for words. The magnitude of this chance meeting hit me! I was wondering what the Japanese captains were thinking and why they let this happen. There were about to be 100 silent witnesses to their actions. We had

become their worst nightmare!

There were five ships: a fuel tanker and what I thought were four whale chasers, one on the horizon. The tanker had been resupplying the others in the calm weather with huge fenders over the side. All were stationary except for one chaser on the horizon, five miles out, which turned into the sun and steamed away.

We made one polite VHF call to the tanker with no response. None had their



This photo: Japanese tanker off Mertz Glacier pulling in fenders. Below: Screen grab from the Sea Shepherd website showing the *Ady Gil's* ill-fated encounter with the Japanese whalers.

AIS switched on. I informed the guests over the intercom and all came running on deck, some in tears at the sight. Killer whales were all around and so, too, minke whales, the main target of the hunt. The sheer contrast was devastating. They were killing our whales in our backyard. Emotions were running high.

I immediately sent position reports to the Australian and New Zealand Governments, as required under our permits, then called a meeting with all the guests who were wondering what we could do. I removed my Expedition Leader Hat and became Don McIntyre, joining the passengers on this issue.

When the Sea Shepherd crews are the

the whalers would run if they saw that. But we had to get the news to the Sea Shepherd Society as quickly as possible. A web search got the numbers and out went the co-ordinates. A few hours later, we took the first call and they simply said the info was "extremely useful" and wanted to know about the mothership.

### TARGET FOUND

We had not seen the mothership, but then we checked the only blurry photo we had of the chaser, way on the horizon, the ship that ran away. Bingo! It was the mothership, the target they needed. That explained why the rest of the fleet were stationary. They wanted *Orion* to stay with them.

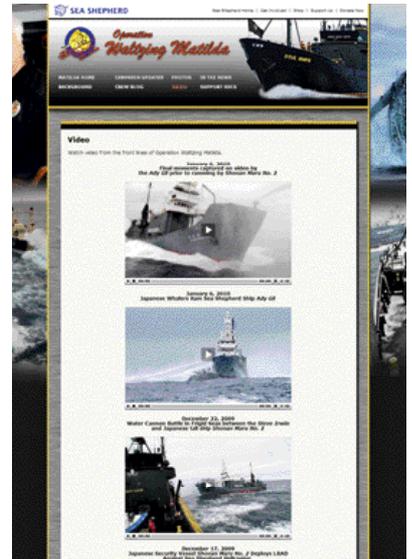
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only ones out there doing something, they deserve support. I had sold my helicopter to Sea Shepherd a few years before and knew the pilot. That same chopper was onboard the *Steve Irwin*, headed south about 700nm away from us. The support vessel, *Ady Gil*, was somewhere in Antarctica. But where?

We all agreed not to alert the media, as

We discussed tailing the fleet till Sea Shepherd arrived, but unknown to us the mothership would have got away. Then, to everyone's surprise and great excitement, a secret third Sea Shepherd ship, the 1200-tonne *Bob Barker*, made contact 30 hours after our first sighting.

The rest, as they say, is history. I saw the *Ady Gil* in Hobart before they set out. Now



that was an adventure of the first order! The captain and officers on *Orion* strongly disagree with the Sea Shepherd tactics, which most professional mariners would, and I fully respect that opinion.

I am of the opinion that the Japanese are not doing anything illegal and can take all the whales they want under their permit, but I don't like it.

I truly hope Australia's Antarctic/Southern Ocean whale sanctuary will stand up in the international courts, but my understanding of the sovereignty issues down south suggest otherwise.