

Dear Friends,

We are sending you a translation of our request to the Okinawa Prefectural Governor Hirokazu Nakaima to deny an approval for the application to landfill the waters off Henoko. The Henoko coastal waters, rich in wildlife, contain a large seagrass colony and remain an important feeding place for the surviving Okinawa dugongs, the Northernmost population of the species and on the verge of extinction. On March 22, 2013, Minister of Defense Itsunori Onodera filed with the Governor application for approval to landfill waters off Henoko in order to build a new US Marine base. It is reported that the Governor will make his decision on the project sometime during the coming December.

The Okinawa Defense Bureau, a division of the Defense Ministry and the contractor for the project, claims that “According to the EIA study, dugongs will stay one kilometer or farther away from the construction site throughout the execution of the project”.

The Governor Nakaima issued his opinion concerning the EIA stating that the execution of the project would cause serious environmental harm. Accordingly, the Defense Bureau reviewed the EIA and submitted a revised version which maintained the claim that the waters off Henoko, once regularly visited by dugongs, are no more used by the animals, and repeated the claim that the dugongs will stay far away from the construction site.

Recently a number of newspapers including September 22 issue of the Tokyo Shimbun reported that dugong feeding traces were found in the waters off Henoko through April to June last year and that a dugong was sighted in Oura Bay, adjacent to the Henoko beach. These reports were based on findings by Kyodo News reporters, disclosing, under the Freedom of Information Act, information concealed by the Defense Bureau, making it clear that the Defense Bureau had known that dugongs returned to Henoko waters during the period that the Bureau was reviewing the EIA.

We hope you will read the following request to the Governor and help us in our effort to save the Okinawa dugong from extinction.

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Honorable Okinawa Prefectural Governor Hirokazu Nakaima,

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Please Keep Standing With The Okinawa People In An
Effort To Protect The Waters Off Henoko

As reported by recent newspapers feeding traces of dugongs were observed in the waters off Henoko through April to June last year. Those traces were reported to be first found since 2009. It was also reported that a dugong was observed swimming in Oura Bay in May last year. These facts, so welcome for us, had been hidden away by the Okinawa Defense Bureau until reporters disclosed them using the 'right to know' system. For the Defense Bureau those findings constitute 'inconvenient truths', since the EIA submitted by the Bureau claims that the dugongs will stay one kilometer or farther away from the new Henoko base construction site during the execution of the construction work.

A member of our group called up the Defense Bureau and pointed out the discrepancy between the EIA claim and the recent media disclosure. The person on the phone replied, "Our EIA states that the dugongs will stay far away from the construction site during the work period. Dugongs visited the waters off Henoko last year but the construction work has not been started yet. During the work period, as stated by the EIA, dugongs will stay far away."

The Bureau's claim is based on the observation of dugongs' behavior during the EIA study. The EIA was submitted on December 28, 2011. The Defense Bureau tries to persuade us that the findings after the EIA study ended are not to be taken into account. However, it was December 18, 2012 that the revised version of the EIA was submitted. It was during the period when the revised version was being worked upon that the Bureau came upon the 'inconvenient truths'. It is no longer possible to deny that the waters off Henoko and Oura Bay are parts of the Okinawa dugong's habitat.

Members of our group, especially those belonging to Team Zan, the field study group

in Nago City, are striving to protect the dugong and to ensure that coming generations may enjoy the beautiful Henoko sea, rich in wildlife. Reclaiming the waters off Henoko and a part of Oura Bay will destroy an important part of dugong habitat. It violates our rights to protect the endangered Okinawa dugongs and their sea.

The Article 14 (1) and the Article 15 (1) of the Basic Act on Biodiversity state that the Government shall conserve the biodiversity of endemic organisms and endangered species. The Okinawa Defense Bureau, a division of the Ministry of Defense, is going against the very purport of the Act by planning to landfill the waters off Henoko. The Bureau is deceiving the nation by trying to hide important facts concerning the endangered dugong and is going ahead to destroy its habitat.

The Bureau also claims that the loss of the seagrass colony in the waters off Henoko will be mitigated by transplanting it.

We believe that the habitat, and waters suitable for the habitat of the Okinawa dugong, with only so few members left, must be conserved. So far, every trial for transplanting seagrass in Okinawa waters has failed. It may be possible to transplant it in waters far from Okinawa. However, the kind of seagrass transplanted in regions remote from Okinawa may not be edible to dugong. Such regions may not be suitable as dugong habitat. Relocating dugong to a remote place may not be possible. According to a researcher belonging to The Nature Conservation Society of Japan, knowledgeable on seagrass, the document concerning the seagrass transplanting referred to by the Defense Bureau in the EIA is, scientifically speaking, far from valuable.

Honorable Governor, we are proud of your proclamation concerning the EIA : “This project poses a grave problem as regards the conservation of the environment. The measures proposed in the EIA are inadequate to ensure the welfare of the local residents and conserve natural environment adjacent to the construction site.”

Environmental impact associated with obtaining the landfill materials and dumping them into the sea must be strictly assessed. This, however, is neglected by the Defense Bureau. In order to judge whether or not to approve the landfill application it is necessary to know if the landfill materials contain hazardous materials. This information, however, has not been provided by the Defense Bureau.

The Article 27 of the Basic Act on Biodiversity imposes an obligation on a local authority to conserve biodiversity.

We sincerely beg you to continue to stand with the Okinawa people opposing a new base in their prefecture and, in order to ensure welfare of the prefectural people and to conserve the natural environment, to deny the landfill application.