

September 30, 2014

Minister of Defense Akinori Eto
The Director General of Okinawa Defense Bureau Kazunori Inoue

Honorable Sirs,

We respectfully insist that you immediately discontinue the destruction of vital dugong feeding areas which is driving the already highly endangered Okinawa dugong population nearer to extinction.

We have been studying Okinawa dugong behavior since 2007. We carried out seven field studies between May 16 and July 29, 2014 within the coastal area off Camp Schwab, in Henoko, Nago City, Okinawa, the area designated for the construction on landfill of a US base. We identified, in total, more than 100 feeding traces made by dugongs; on June 18, for example, more than 18 new feeding traces were found.

However, since July 14, when we identified 8 feeding traces, we have been unable to find new traces. The main cause for this decline is believed to be the recent installation, by the Coast Guard, of a pier and the mooring of a large number of rubber boats exactly upon the spots where the feeding traces had been most dense. The Coast Guard is using the boats to chase away canoe-borne citizens protesting the construction of the new base. The guards have also tried to stop us from carrying out the field study; consequently, the study has become almost impossible. Furthermore, since August 14, a large portion of Oura Bay, containing the places where the dugong feeding traces were most commonly found, has been enclosed by long lines of buoys and floats. The guards are violently harassing the protesters; the coastal area is now in an emergency situation. The noise made by the guard ships is, we are afraid, disturbing and chasing away the dugongs; no dugong feeding traces have been found within Oura Bay since July, even in the parts not enclosed.

The Okinawa Defense Bureau ignores this reality and repeats the already discredited claims made in their Environmental Impact Assessment for the landfill and the base construction which concludes that the execution of the planned operations would not cause significant harm to the individual dugongs and that the impact of the operation upon the conservation of the Okinawa dugong population would be negligible.

The Bureau also claims that, transplanting a part of the sea-grass beds where the dugongs feed will mitigate possible impact to the dugong population.

Sea-grass transplantation has been attempted since 1985 in the Awase tideland, in Nakagusuku Bay but it was concluded that environmental conservation through sea-grass transplantation was impossible. Nowhere in Okinawa has sea-grass transplantation been successful. Such transplantation would only disrupt the ecosystem of the target area. Moreover, far from mitigating the impact on the dugong, it would merely accelerate the degradation of the sea-grass beds within Oura Bay and in the waters off Henoko. Further destruction of the existing dugong feeding areas is absolutely unacceptable.

Even in Kayo waters, a few kilometers to the north-east of Henoko, where we have been monitoring dugong behavior for the last five years, the distribution of their feeding traces is, of late, unusual. We fear that the disruptive passage of guard ships and helicopter patrols over the waters off Henoko are disturbing even the dugongs frequenting the Kayo waters. In July and August, repeated dugong sightings were broadcast in the media; we suppose that the sighted individual is the one feeding in the waters off Kayo and Henoko.

On May 22, the Procurement Section of the Okinawa Defense Bureau published, in Japanese, its 'Report on the Study of the Marine Life in the Waters off Camp Schwab (H24)' which showed that dugong feeding traces were found in these waters in 2013. Combining this with the findings reported last year, it is concluded that the dugongs have been feeding in the waters off Henoko continually for these three years.

The waters off Henoko and Oura Bay, together with the sea-areas off Kayo and Kouri, comprise important feeding areas for dugongs. Dugongs have frequently been sighted between Cape Gimi and Cape Ban, to the east of Henoko. Any ecosystem disruption in these waters is gravely harmful to the surviving extremely small dugong population.

We sincerely wish to see the Okinawa dugong, the world's northernmost population of the species, survive and live peacefully, safe from further disturbance.

We demand that:

- 1) The Okinawa Defense Bureau immediately discontinue destruction of the dugong feeding areas and disruption of the ecosystem in the waters off Henoko and Oura Bay.
- 2) The Coast Guard return to their 'duties maintaining safety at sea' and stop their excessive 'security operations' against the protesting citizens.
- 3) The seabed boring survey, which is disrupting the dugong feeding places, is immediately discontinued; and the guard ships and rubber boats removed.
- 4) Plans to destroy marine ecosystems and violate local fishing rights by destroying the reefs and landfilling are withdrawn.
- 5) The enclosure of waters for public use and the obstruction of dugong behavior studies within the waters off Henoko and Oura Bay are immediately ended.

The Northernmost Dugong Study Group Team Zan

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