

Mr. Francesco Bandarin
Director
UNESCO World Heritage Centre
7, place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris 07 SP
France

March 30, 2005

Dear Mr. Francesco Bandarin,

Re: Response to the letter from the World Conservation Union (IUCN)
concerning Shiretoko (Japan)

Please find enclosed our response to the letter concerning the Shiretoko World Natural Heritage nominated site, sent by Dr. William J. Jackson, Director of the IUCN Global Programme, dated February 2, 2005.

This response was prepared based on scientific advice from marine experts, in consultation with relevant local stakeholders including fisheries organizations as well as Hokkaido prefectural government which is responsible for management of the marine area. It reaffirms our intention to promote initiatives aimed at maintaining the characteristic interrelationship between the terrestrial and marine ecosystems of the nominated site.

In addition, please find enclosed an appendix to the nomination document, which contains a record of communications with IUCN since the submission of the nomination and the relevant documents.

Sincerely yours,

Hiroshi ONODERA
Director General
Nature Conservation Bureau
Ministry of the Environment

**Response to the letter from the World Conservation Union (IUCN)
dated February 2**

(a) Regarding the possibility of expediting the Marine Management Plan, as well as strengthening the provisions within this Plan so as to ensure the protection of marine species

(1) Time frame and procedures for formulation of the Plan

- The "Multiple-use integrated marine management plan" was initially expected to be formulated within a time frame of five to ten years. However, the time frame for formulation of the Marine Management Plan will now be reduced to three years or less, by actively performing an immediate fact-finding survey on the state of marine life, fisheries activities and leisure fishing in the area, along with expediting the process of forming a consensus of local fishermen and other stakeholders based on the advices from the Shiretoko World Heritage Nominated Site Scientific Council, which was established last July in accordance with the Management Plan for the Shiretoko World Natural Heritage Nominated Site (January 2004).
- In formulating the Marine Management Plan, the Marine Area Working Group under the Shiretoko World Heritage Nominated Site Scientific Council will, within a period of one year, compile all advice necessary to prepare a draft of the Plan, including current fishery restrictions and putting the voluntary restrictions enforced by fishermen and fisheries organizations in the statutory form (see attachment). Subsequently, relevant governmental agencies will, based on this advice, finalize the Marine Management Plan on the premise of existing fisheries rules in consultation with relevant local organizations such as fisheries ones and research institutions such as universities and fisheries research institutes. During that process, the governmental agencies will obtain advice from the Shiretoko World Heritage Nominated Site Scientific Council and also formulate a consensus by gathering opinions through public participation procedures, such as explanatory meetings for local fisheries organizations and stakeholders, and other opinion-submitting procedures.

(2) Basic policies of the Marine Management Plan

- The two basic policies of the Marine Management Plan are as follows. Each of these policies is in keeping with the principles given in the Management Plan for the Shiretoko World Natural Heritage Nominated Site and the key points explained to local stakeholders when the plan was formulated.
 - (i) The objective of the Plan is to ensure a balance between stable fisheries through the sustainable use of fisheries resources and the conservation of marine life and ecosystems.
 - (ii) The premise of the Plan is community-based marine resource management modeled after existing fishery restrictions and voluntary restrictions carried out by fishermen and fisheries organizations in the nominated marine area.

(3) Content of the Plan

- Since current voluntary restrictions enforced by local fishermen and fisheries organizations are highly regarded, the first step in formulating the Plan will be to reorganize these voluntary measures and other existing fishery restrictions into an easily comprehensible statement, and to make community-based marine resource management one of the basic premises of the Plan.
- The Plan will identify proper and reliable measures for the conservation management of marine life such as walleye pollack *Theragra chalcogramma* and other fishes that are important fisheries resources and that support the food chain and material cycle in the marine ecosystem, as well as marine mammals (Steller sea lion *Eumetopias jubatus* and seals) and sea eagles (Steller's sea eagle *Haliaeetus pelagicus* and white-tailed eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*), by specifying necessary regulations in detail with regard to the following topics.

(i) Research and monitoring

- The Plan will identify the targets, content, methods, priorities and other items relating to the research and monitoring activities. These items will be reviewed and adapted through scientific verification of the results of research and monitoring.

(ii) Strategies to maintain fisheries resources for continuing sustainable fisheries and measures for conservation and management of marine life and ecosystems

- The Plan will contain the following items, including the methods to reflect the findings of future research and monitoring.
 - With regards to fisheries resources, existing fishery restrictions and voluntary restrictions enforced by local fishermen and fishery organizations will be incorporated into the Plan as community-based marine resource management initiatives. Furthermore, the Plan will identify strategies and measures necessary for sustainable use of fisheries resources, and conservation and management of marine life and ecosystems, based on scientific verification of the research and monitoring findings and with the agreement of local fishermen, fisheries organizations and other stakeholders.
 - With regards to marine mammals, the Plan will identify proper management strategies for Steller sea lion and seals in the marine area surrounding Shiretoko based on a survey currently being conducted on the visitation patterns, feeding behavior and food habits of these marine mammals, as well as a fact-finding survey on the impacts regarding fisheries, and with the agreement of local fishermen, fisheries organization and other stakeholders.
 - With regards to sea eagles, the Plan will identify conservation and management measures including the protection of wintering sites and breeding sites, in conformity with the "Program for the Rehabilitation of Natural Habitats and Maintenance of Viable Population" targeting Steller's sea eagle and white-tailed eagle currently under development.

- (iii) Strategies to promote proper use of the nominated site for marine recreation
 - The Plan will identify strategies to promote the proper use of the nominated site for marine recreation, which is forecasted to increase should the site be inscribed on the World Heritage list, based on the understanding of the current status of marine recreation activities such as kayaking in the nominated site and usage of the site's marine area for leisure fishing and powerboating.
 - These strategies will include those to prevent and reduce the impact of marine recreation activities on seabirds, marine mammals and other marine life.

(iv) Administrative Structure

- The Plan will clarify the sharing of responsibility and the way of coordination among local residents and organizations, relevant governmental agencies and research institutions.

(b) Regarding the possibility of substantial extending the marine component of the nominated site

(1) Area of extension

- A study into the possibility of extending the marine component of the nominated site was conducted in consultation with the Shiretoko World Heritage Nominated Site Scientific Council, which includes marine experts among its members. As a result, the marine component of the nominated site will be extended from the current area within 1km from the coastline to the area within 3km from the coastline, which includes a 200m deep underwater shelf, for the following reasons:

- (i) In the surroundings of the nominated site, the shelf extends from the coast to the steep decline at 200 m in depth. This geographical feature is particularly remarkable along the Rausu coastal area in Nemuro Strait. Above the shelf, the phytoplankton bloom occurs due to high nutrients, which are supplied from the melting of sea ice and the circulation of deep water. Therefore, this area has the high productivity of zooplankton and fish, and is known as one of the high production area in the subarctic marine ecosystem. In these lights, the shelf shows a remarkable example of the characteristic mechanism of seasonal sea ice area, and is a particularly important area for maintaining the interrelationship between the marine and terrestrial ecosystems.
- (ii) The marine area surrounding the nominated site is impacted by seasonal changes of cold and warm currents as well as sea ice, and is home to a highly diverse range of marine species. For example, 150 of the 223 species of fish recorded in the coastal waters off the Shiretoko Peninsula primarily inhabit shallow waters of 200m or less in depth. With regard to the proportion of the number of species of "northern fishes" and "widely distributed fishes and southern fishes" in shallow waters and deep waters down to 200m in depth, the percentage of "widely distributed fishes and southern fishes" is approximately 35% in shallow waters while the corresponding figure is approximately 15% in deep waters. As a result, the waters down to 200m in depth show the characteristic of the nominated site as a unique area where northern fishes and southern fishes coexist most remarkably. In addition, fishes that inhabit the

surface of the shelf area are utilized as a fishery resource and are an important source of food for the seabirds and white-tailed eagles that nest on the coast as well as Steller's sea eagle during its wintering season. The entire shelf area is thus an important feeding area for these birds.

- (iii) At present, there is a lack of data concerning the life history and other ecological information of major marine species inhabiting the marine area surrounding the nominated site, and it is necessary to be addressed in future research and monitoring activities. A depth range of 0-200m is appropriate for carrying out proper and reliable conservation and management through detailed monitoring to maintain the ecological value of the nominated site, in addition to individual monitoring of living marine species.
- (iv) The area within 3km from the coastline is required in order to include 90% or more of the marine area that is 200m or less deep.

(2) Measures to ensure protection

- The newly extended marine component of the nominated site will be protected as a part of the Shiretoko National Park based on the Natural Parks Law. Procedures required for this extension under provisions in the Natural Parks Law will be completed by the end of 2005 at the shortest.
- If the marine component of the nominated site is extended to 3km from the coastline, the area of the marine component will be as follows.

Area of the Marine Component of the Shiretoko World Natural Heritage
Nominated Site (provisional assessment)

	Area of Nominated Site (ha)	Breakdown (ha)		Ratio (%)	
		(Terrestrial)	(Marine)	(Terrestrial)	(Marine)
Original Plan (A) (Marine component extends 1km from the coastline)	56,100	48,700	7,400	87	13
Revised Plan (B) (Marine component extends 3km from the coastline)	71,100	48,700	22,400	68	32

Difference (B) - (A)	+ 15,000	± 0	+ 15,000
(B) / (A)	1.27	1.00	3.03