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The World Conservation Union

Mr Hiroshi Onodera
Director General
Nature Conservation Bureau
Ministry of the Environment
1-2-2 Kasumigaseki, Chiyodaku
Tokyo 100-8975 Japan

20 August 2004

Dear Mr Onodera,

Re: Shiretoko evaluation

It was a pleasure to visit Japan recently to undertake the evaluation of Shiretoko as a potential natural world heritage site. As I mentioned to you, I found this to be an outstanding mission and that the structure and content of the mission provided an excellent opportunity to closely examine the site and to discuss key issues. I would like to sincerely thank you and your staff for your very warm hospitality when I was in Japan and also for all of their hard work in making this such a successful mission. I will write separately to a number of your staff who were involved in the mission but it would be appreciated if you could also pass on my most sincere appreciation to those staff who were involved in this mission.

At the conclusion of the mission on the 26 July in Tokyo, I provided a number of informal comments on the field evaluation of Shiretoko and a copy of these comments were left with your staff. I mentioned in these remarks that a letter would be sent from IUCN to the Japan Ministry of the Environment within 3-4 weeks.

Accordingly IUCN is delighted to provide some additional comments and we would appreciate feedback from the Japanese Government on the points raised.

1. As was mentioned at the meeting on 26 July, the importance of this site clearly relates to the productivity of the ecosystem and the plant and animal life that this site supports. This reflects the presence of the most southerly sea ice in the northern hemisphere. The importance of the site as a habitat for globally threatened sea birds and the density of brown bear populations is also clear and well set out in the nomination document. The fundamental importance of this site primarily rests on the interrelationship between the terrestrial and marine component and this interrelationship is essential for sustainability in the long term.

2. The level of management of the terrestrial component of the nominated site is high. The evaluation mission was particularly impressed by the close cooperation between the Ministry of Environment and the Forestry Department, as well as the excellent collaboration between government and key stakeholder groups, such as Shiretoko 100 Sq Metre Trust.

However, there is no commensurate protection regime for the marine component and it is by no means clear that the limited marine area included within the nomination is

sufficient habitat to ensure the sustainability of those terrestrial animals dependent on marine food sources.

3. There are two specific concerns that IUCN would like to address in this letter:

Marine component of the nominated site and fisheries

4. In relation to the marine component the evaluation mission raised a number of concerns at the meeting on the 26 July and IUCN would like to emphasise the following points:

- (a) the protection of a site as world heritage implies the highest possible level of legal protection for the site as a whole. In the case of the nominated site, the significance of the site derives from the inter-relationship between the values of the terrestrial and the marine component of the nominated site.
- (b) the marine component of the nominated site is only 1 km from the shore and is currently classed as an "ordinary zone" and buffer area, within the Shiretoko Management Plan. IUCN understands that this is one of the lowest levels of protection available for protected areas under the National Parks legislation administered by the Ministry of the Environment. It is also understood that fishing occurs throughout the nominated site at the moment.
- (c) Presentations to the evaluation mission noted the decline in catch of the walleye pollock. This is of concern as the walleye pollock is one of the main food sources of the Stellar Sea Lion, one of the flagship species of the nominated site.
- (d) The evaluation mission noted that fishing is a vitally important industry in the region around the nominated site and is therefore a sensitive issue. It is appreciated that this activity has been undertaken in the area for a considerable period of time. This importance was particularly underlined at the meeting with local communities around Shiretoko during the evaluation mission. It is understood that some consultation has taken place with fisheries interests in relation to the prescriptions in the management plan regarding fisheries, such as those relating to restrictions and prohibitions on capture of Sakhalin surf clams and seas urchins and prohibitions on certain fishing methods.
- (e) IUCN is aware of the increasing evidence from around the world to support the link between the establishment of well managed marine protected areas (MPAs) and the conservation of fisheries stocks. It is further noted that there are currently many global efforts underway to develop representative marine protected areas, designed to conserve important areas of marine biodiversity and, in turn, to assist fisheries sustainability. Examples from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Protected Area, a world heritage site in Australia, provide one example in relation to the planning of a representative marine protected areas system. There are many other examples which were highlighted at the Vth World Parks Congress. Lessons from these examples include the need to: (a) establish clear priorities; (b) base policies on the best science; (c) work co-operatively with the fisheries sector; and (d) that consultation takes time.

4. Since the evaluation mission, IUCN has consulted with various fisheries and marine conservation experts in relation to this site. The initial view is that there is a need for enhanced protection at this site and that this should involve:

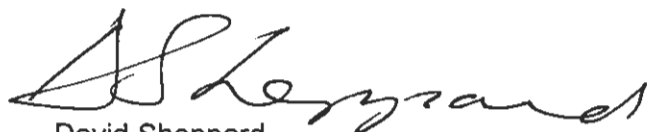
- ✓ in the short term, strengthening the level of protection within the marine component of the nominated site. This should aim to ensure that breeding, spawning, and nursery sites for key fish species within the nominated site, such as the walleye pollock, are strictly protected and that no fishing should be allowed in these areas. The life cycle analysis of key species and the identification of no take areas should be based on the best science available. The fishing industry needs to be involved in this process to ensure any protection measures are agreed to by all stakeholders and will be implemented.
- ✓ in the longer term, using research into the location of breeding and feeding habitats for key fish species in the Sea of Okotsk and the Nemuro Straits to establish representative marine protected areas within and surrounding the nominated site. This would also be based on the best available science and could draw on examples from other parts of the world.

Dam Construction on Rivers

In relation to the channelling and impounding of many rivers on Shiretoko Peninsula, IUCN is concerned at the number of dams on the rivers and also that the nomination document states the impact of "constructions on salmon is not clear yet, and is going to be investigated". It is suggested that this research be accelerated and that the overall aim of management is restoration and maintenance of natural river flows and processes. This could imply the removal of some of these structures in the future where there is not a significant risk to human welfare and livelihoods. IUCN would also seek a commitment from the Japan Government that fish ladders be installed to allow for the free movement of salmon on all structures maintained on the rivers in the nominated site.

We would appreciate your response on these points as this will greatly facilitate the preparation of the final IUCN Evaluation Report. Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely,



David Sheppard
Head
Programme on Protected Areas