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High Noon At the Killing Cove

Pro Surfer Dave Rastovich, Actress Hayden Panettiere and 20 others risk arrest in Japan paddling out for dolphins' future.

OSAKA, JAPAN - October 28, 2007 -- Acclaimed professional surfer and dolphin defender Dave Rastovich made a bold declaration against the ongoing commercial slaughter of dolphins in Japan by leading an international crew of surfers, musicians, actors and activists in a traditional surfing "paddle-out" ceremony to honor the memory of the thousands of dolphins killed each year at the notorious "killing cove" in Taiji Japan.

In a moving mid-afternoon ritual under grey rainy skies, with local Taiji fishermen and police scrutinizing the group, Rastovich formed the surfers in a circle over the placid waters of the small scenic cove and asked each to say a small prayer of remembrance for their fellow waveriders. An estimated 25,000 dolphins and porpoises each year are slaughtered by Japanese fishermen, either harvested for their meat in annual "drives" or captured for sale to marine and captive swim parks.

The group, representing Australia, the US and New Zealand, joined the circle with a small contingent of Japanese surfers www.SaveJapanDolphins.org. Once the circle was completed, each offered a ceremonial flower to honor the departed waveriders. Surfers have traditionally held dolphins in near sacred regard for their companionship and intelligent fun-loving natures.

"In surfing culture, it is customary to hold this type of ceremony to show respect to a surfer who has lost his or her life," said "Rasta", an internationally respected professional "free surfer" and co-founder of Surfers For Cetaceans www.surfersforcetaceans.com. "These dolphins, truly the original surfers, are our ocean brothers and sisters and deserve to be remembered and honored in the same way."

Participants included celebrities Hayden Panettiere and Australian actress Isabel Lucas, professional surfers Karlie Mackie, James Pribram, Karina Petroni and Jaymes Triglone together with model Hannah Fraser Rastovich who swam out in her trademark mermaid tail.

Hayden Panettiere, star of TV's hit series "Heroes", paddled out on behalf of "Save The Whales Again!" www.savethewhalesagain.com. She expressed that she felt the spirit of the dolphins who had been driven into the killing cove over the last 400 years.

"We had a moment of silence for all the dolphins that had been killed here," said Panettiere, who uses her celebrity to protect dolphins and whales. "It was highly emotional. I wished for peace and for no more pain at this beautiful yet tragic cove."

The Taiji fishermen, who defend the kills as part of their traditional fishing culture, had planned to stop the ceremony through force and police arrest. The possibility of a locally led resistance was averted by a dramatic last-minute turnaround. Rastovich was able to broker a meeting with area locals less than 12 hours before the paddle-out crew arrived unannounced at the killing cove.

Although the local fishermen were visibly unhappy with the event's exposure of their practices, they respected the group's peaceful intentions and desire to honor the dolphin's spirit through a longstanding surfer tradition. They honored Rastovich's group by allowing the ceremony to progress without incident. The locals were relieved to see an outside group coming with respect and concern rather than blanket condemnation. The police, however, did briefly detain the group to verify passports.

According to Rastovich, the most profound sea of change in meeting with the locals was a rare dialogue between the dolphin fisherman and the dolphin defenders in a scenario that often turns highly confrontational.

"I was surprised to find out that some of the locals had little or no knowledge of the high levels of mercury and other toxins contained in the dolphin meat they eat on a regular basis," said Rastovich. "Then when I told them that two of their own city councilmen had made public this same information, they were shocked that I had the information and they didn't."

Japanese government health studies have shown that dolphin and whale meat can contain more than 10-16 times the healthful level of mercury. Elevated levels of mercury have been proven to cause birth defects, neural damage and death. Several Japanese supermarkets have pulled all whale and dolphin meat from their shelves due to health risks. Despite this, however, the majority of the Japanese public is unaware of these dangers, and it continues to be sold throughout Japan while the killing continues.

About Minds In The Water

Minds in the Water and the MITW Visual Petition are teamed in a global awareness campaign dedicated to the conservation of marine mammals and the world's oceans. It's through insightful multimedia content such as cinematic and pictorial elements from which the voices of ocean minded people everywhere are heard. For more information on the visual petition and the Minds in the Water campaign, please visit: <http://www.mindsinthewater.com>

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