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JAPANESE SHIP INVOLVED IN GENUINE WHALE RESEARCH

A whale research vessel refuelling in Fremantle is not part of the Japanese whaling fleet involved in the lethal hunt for whales in the Southern Ocean.

The *Shonan Maru II* will conduct non-lethal research on whale numbers in Antarctic waters under a program endorsed by the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission (IWC).

The international group of scientists on board the *Shonan Maru II* are led by a New Zealander. Their research is part of a scientific program that began in the early 1970s – Southern Ocean Whale and Ecosystem Research. This program makes sighting surveys and takes some small biopsy samples from living whales to monitor their populations and assess their recovery following decades of whaling.

The research is a prime model of non-lethal whale research, providing crucial information about whale populations, and this year includes an aerial survey coordinated by the Australian Antarctic Division.

The SOWER program will operate in Antarctic waters until late February. The results of research obtained in previous IWC SOWER cruises provide the most reliable population estimates for whales in Antarctic waters. SOWER will present its findings to the 60th annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission in Santiago, Chile in June 2008.