

Paul Watson held for “Crimes” on High Seas

Fifth Estate Collective

1997

Paul Watson, founder of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, was arrested in the Netherlands April 3 by Dutch police acting on a Norwegian warrant.

The president of Sea Shepherd is being held in Lelystad Penitentiary awaiting an extradition hearing. Norway wants Watson to serve a prison sentence handed down in absentia for the 1992 scuttling of an illegal whaling vessel. They also want to charge him with ramming a Norwegian coast guard vessel in July 1994.

However, court documents contradict the warrant and show Watson was not in Norway's Lofoten Islands at the time of the sinking of the boat and another person proudly admits to the deed. 13 independent journalists recorded the collision in the July 1994 incident and video footage shows the Norwegian coast guard cutter purposely ramming Whales Forever, the Sea Shepherd vessel, firing on it twice and detonating four depth charges under the conservation vessel's hull.

This is an election year in Norway and Watson is a hot item for the floundering prime minister, a political appointee without a popular mandate. Holland doesn't know that Watson has received death threats from what is believed to be elements within the powerful Norwegian whaling and fishing industry.

Sea Shepherd takes credit over the years for the sinking of several whalers and destruction of millions of dollars of equipment on boats fishing illegally.

Watson's defenders held a Hollywood press conference, kicking off an international effort urging his release and demanding the Netherlands' reject Norway's request for extradition. Numerous film makers, and movie and television stars voiced their support for him, noting his importance to the environmental movement over the last two decades.

Designating him a political prisoner, they voiced concern over Watson's safety. "We know Paul will be killed if he is extradited to Norway," said Lisa Distefano, Watson's wife and international director of Sea Shepherd.

Numerous Hollywood celebrities and environmental groups have already contacted the Dutch government asking them to deny extradition. Sea Shepherd is asking everyone to write the Dutch Minister of Justice, W. Sorgdrager, PO Box 20301, 2500 EH, The Hague, The Netherlands to support Watson.

Sea Shepherd can be reached at P.O. Box 628, Venice CA 90294; phone (310) 301-7325; they have slides and video available of the ramming incident.

In Canada, P.O. Box 48446, Vancouver BC V7X 1A2; (604) 688-7325.



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