

Sakhalin II. Concern of Oil Spill - Before the first LNG export

February 9 – Sakhalin Japan Wildlife Network

The inauguration for the LNG plant under the Sakhalin II project, which is to be attended by President Medvedev and Prime Minister Asou, is scheduled to be held on February 18. On the other hand, the facts that both the Russian and Japanese governments are not taking effective measures to maintain the natural environment and fishery resources in Okhotsk area and respond to possible oil spill on large scale, have generated a concern among Russian and Japanese parties concerned.

Late January this year, a number of birds were found drenched by oil on the Aniva Bay coast in the south of Sakhalin Island, Russia. A local environmentalist group brought a criminal suit against the government for its inappropriate reactions against the matter. "Sakhalin Environment Watch" ("SEW"), an environmentalist group based on Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, the capital city of Sakhalin state said that along the Aniva Bay coast for 7 – 8 km long 120 birds were found drenched by oil. They requested investigation by Ministry of Emergency Situations who is in charge for oil spill, but the ministry answered that they were not able to do any investigation for oil spill because they possessed neither a helicopter nor a boat.

SEW therefore brought a criminal suit to the Prosecutor's office on January 30 requesting implementation of investigation to discover the reason why the sea birds died. Upon this the committee consisting of Prosecutor's office, Ministry of Emergency Situations and Federal Service for Regulation of the Use of Natural Resources (Rosprirodnadzor) assured on February 2 that it would continue the investigation. However, according to Natasha Lisitsyna of SEW, up to now, authorities have not tried to analyze the oil which contaminated the birds. SEW therefore directly asked an institute in Moscow for investigation. "Russian authorities do not want to take appropriate actions. The same will possibly happen in the future, too." Natasha said.

SEW also says that the number of birds suffered from the oil spill would not be less than 1000. The cause of the oil spill this time has not been determined. Sakhalin Energy, the owner of the Sakhalin II project, said there was no oil spill from their facilities.

Dr. Keisuke Saito, a veterinary surgeon at Institute for Raptor Biomedicine Japan and the representative of Sakhalin Japan Wildlife Network, an environmentalist group coping with environmental protection in Sakhalin Island and Okhotsk area, commented that "Possibility is quite high that sea birds wintering at Aniva Bay and some other wildlife are suffering from the oil spill. Russian government is requested to start investigating the cause of oil spill, current status and damages sustained by wildlife and to disclose the information. If oil spill still continues, measures have to be taken in order to minimize the damages. Also, oil as well as contaminated birds might be washed up on the Hokkaido's shore facing to Okhotsk

Sea. Japanese government is to closely communicate with the Russian authorities, to be on sea patrol and to prepare for the possible emergency.”

“Prime Minister Asou is scheduled to visit Sakhalin in order to attend the Sakhalin II inauguration together with President Medvedev. The Japanese government should request the Russian government to take necessary and sufficient measures to prevent oil spill so that affluent natural environment, fishery resources and valuable wildlife in Okhotsk area would not be lost in compensation for the stable energy supply”, he added.

It is also being pointed out by experts that the measures taken by the Japanese government are not sufficient. Under Sakhalin II project year-round oil production started in December last year. If LNG exports start, an oil tanker will navigate once on every fourth day (annually 90 times) in Aniva Bay and an LNG tanker once on every second day (annually 160 times). In cooperation with the Russian government, the Japanese government should take measures to protect maritime environment and maintain safety in Soya Straits with increasing number of tankers navigating.

Currently, on Sakhalin Shelf, Sakhalin I and II are in operation. Further projects are planned until IX, and also, a new development is programmed in Kamchatka. “Many of the important habitats and relay points for migratory birds are around the development sites as well as the pipeline routes now in progress or under planning, which are designated by the Convention between the Japanese government and the Russian government for the protection of migratory birds and birds in danger of extinction and their environment” Dr. Saito said. He further underlined the importance of the measures to be taken by both the Japanese and Russian governments by pointing out “that the governments really take such measures to preserve the wildlife in order to maintain coexistence will show their seriousness in terms of environmental protection.”

On the meeting between the Japanese Prime Minister and the Russian President held on the occasion of Summit in Toyako, Hokkaido last year the then Prime Minister Fukuda and President Medvedev welcomed the “Cooperation Program between Governments” for the purpose of ecological system protection under which co-researches between Japan and Russia were proposed and agreed to proceed program in cooperation. However, so far there is no program which has taken shape.

In order to protect the natural environment and fishery resources in Okhotsk area, it is ideal that environmental protection measures promoted by both Japanese and Russian governments are put into practice. However, seeing the reactions against the oil spill issue, serious concern remains even at this timing where the inauguration is scheduled on the 18th of this month.

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What is Sakhalin Japan Wildlife Network (Sakhalin Net)?

Established on November 2007, Sakhalin Japan Wildlife Network (Sakhalin Net) is a network of researchers, NGOs, and individuals who are interested in activities to conserve biodiversity and wildlife in Sakhalin and Japan. Activities include symposium, seminars, petitions and researches aiming at preserving biodiversity at Okhotsk region. Sakhalin Net also participates in the “Biodiversity Group” which was formed under Sakhalin state with development of oil and gas project.

Photos (Sakhalin Environment Watch, taken at the coast of Aniva Bay on Jan 27th 2009)

