1. Introduction

For over three decades the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society ('SSCS') has declared that its mission is to: 'investigate violations; enforce laws; and protect global marine life summed up in three words 'defend, conserve, protect.' (Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, 2013). It’s leader since inception Paul Watson, an iconoclast, a clever media manipulator and skilled provocateur has declared that he is unwilling to live in a world devoid of whales. Thus, guided by his vision, the ever-growing SSCS has sought to curb exploitation of marine life through direct action (Watson, 1992, 10; Sea Shepherd Society, 2013).

To protect oceanic life Watson has made it his, and the SSCS organization he controls, life’s work to interfere and harass with ongoing whaling and to ‘police’ international waters, where no single nation has jurisdiction (Watson, 1992, p. 2). Watson believes that: ‘few changes on this planet have taken place solely because of nonviolent action...[and] to remain totally nonviolent is to allow the perpetuation of violence against people, animals and the environment’ (Watson, 1993, p. 131). Thus for Watson and the SSCS, direct militant action is a necessity in the face of the failure of the international community to act to end ongoing oceanic exploitation.

The strategies and tactics employed by Sea Shepherd against the Japanese whaling fleet are designed for global media consumption, are of times violent, and intended to be extremely destructive of property. The SSCS have sought to achieve their goals in a variety of ways including: harassing, boarding, ramming and sinking whaling vessels, hurling noxious liquids at whaling ships to taint whale meat. (Bondaroff, 2011, pp. 42-43).

Given the many militant direct actions carried out by the SSCS over the decades there have been frequent entanglements with legal processes. However, attempts to curtail the group’s activities through either domestic or international law has, to date, been a failure. Through a combination of fear by whaling states of global attention focused on ongoing whaling activities and other non-whaling states being unwilling to act against the SSCS at Japan’s, the group has been able, until very recently, to act almost unimpeded by legal sanctions. The Japanese government however, appears to have decided to pursue Watson and his organization through domestic courts in a bid to scuttle SSCS activities and deprive the group of its leader, Paul Watson. Thus the organisation is at a crossroads, facing the loss of its charismatic leader that potentially threatens its ongoing mission.

This paper will critically examine the biography of Paul Watson, his leaving of Greenpeace under disputed circumstances and his creation of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society. It will further consider the leadership style of the group and its hierarchical structure and the style of SSCS decision-making employed.
It will further scrutinize the groups overarching philosophy and strategy and tactics, and the long history of militant actions done by the organization in the pursuit of its goals. This article will evaluate the attempts by the group’s opponents to deter and determine how successful legal action has been to date and is likely to be in the future. Lastly, it will consider the question of what would the potential loss of the totemic figurehead Paul Watson and ongoing legal issues mean for the SSCS and its future campaigns.

**Part I**

2. **Background of Paul Watson**

The founder and leader of the SSCS, Paul Watson has claimed that even in his childhood he felt an affinity for the ocean (Sydney Morning Herald, 2010). He studied communications at Simon Fraser University in Canada (though he never graduated) and that appears to have given him a great appreciation for the role the global media can play in achieving his objectives (Khatchadourian, 2007, p. 64; Watson, 1993, pp. 8-9). As Watson has noted, for most people, whaling is merely an academic exercise far removed from their day-to-day lives but it requires high drama to make it newsworthy (Watson, 1994, pp. 23-24). The SSCS has utilized this insight brilliantly over the years to advance its agenda to stop ongoing oceanic exploitation.

Watson’s was an early member of Environmental Non-Governmental Organization (ENGO) the Greenpeace (Khatchadourian, 2007, p. 64). Watson’s increasingly combative ways and eagerness for confrontation saw him come into conflict with Greenpeace’s approach of bearing witness to events, rather than directly interfere. In 1976 Watson prevented a Canadian sealer from engaging in the annual seal hunt (Sea Shepherd Log, 1983, p. 4). The Greenpeace Board argued that Watson’s methods were ‘too radical’ and he was expelled from the organization (Sea Shepherd Log, 1983, 4; Khatchadourian, 2007, p. 65). Watson tells a different version of the events arguing he left Greenpeace because they had lost sight of its founding vision (Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, 2013).

3. **Creating the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society**

After separating from Greenpeace, Watson was determined to create an organisation in his own image and founded the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society in 1977 as an alternative to Greenpeace (Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, 2013). The Sea Shepherd organisation was initially created with the express purpose of being ‘devoted to aggressive but non-violent methods’ of protecting sea-life (Sea Shepherd Log, 1983, p. 4). Watson declares his commitment to his cause by saying: ‘at the risk of sounding dramatic, my crew and I are prepared to die for these whales if need be.’ (Darby, 2007, p. 7). After soliciting donations, and with the help of Cleveland Amory (founder of the Fund for Animals), Watson bought a trawler: the Westella. On the 5th December 1978, with the ship renamed the Sea Shepherd, Watson’s vessel became the: ‘first ship in history dedicated exclusively to the enforcement of international marine wildlife conservation law.’ (Watson, 1994, p. 11). The SSCS maintain that they are willing to use diplomacy and education to convince states to end whaling but, if that fails, they are willing to disrupt whaling by any means necessary (Campaigns, 1984, p. 5).

4. **Sea Shepherd Conservation Society Structure**

The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society is a relatively threadbare organisation with an annual budget of approximately US$2 million dollars. The group also makes uses of idealistic volunteers as crew on their voyages that helps defray costs (Khatchadourian, 2007, p. 59). The SSCS is structured financially as a tax-exempt charity and the group makes most of its money (US$1.14 million) thru received ‘solicitations’ and fundraisers (Caprari, 2010, p. 1506; Darby, 2012).

Other comparable direct action groups such as the Earth Liberation Front use ‘democratic consensus’ as a method in the decision making process. Within the SSCS however, Watson acts as the supreme leader and dictator (Watson 1993, p. 55). This need to tightly control events has been described by a former member, as “anarchy run by God” (Khatchadourian, 2007, p. 67).
Part II
5. Militant Direct Actions By the Sea Shepherds

From the start the Sea Shepherd organisation has been involved in a number of direct activities that have challenged both international and domestic law. In March 1979, shortly after forming, the group attended the Canadian seal hunt. The members threw red dye on seal pups to reduce market value and were promptly arrested by the Canadian Coast Guard (Sea Shepherd Log, 1983, p. 4). However, the defining moment for the SSCS and the incident that announced their arrival on the global stage was their attempt to sink the pirate whaling ship the Japanese and Norwegian owned ship Sierra (Weyler, 2004, pp. 542-543; Heller, 2007, pp. 34-35; Scarce, p. 97). Watson has always maintained that: “I knew, we would get maximum world attention when I rammed the Sierra with the Sea Shepherd” (Watson, 1982, p. 211).

Watson and his crew found the Sierra off the coast of Portugal (Watson 1982, pp. 226-227). He and his ship did not sink the Sierra but did tear a six-foot hole in the side of the ship and stove in forty-five feet of the hull (Scarce, p. 2007, 99; Weyler, 2004, p. 543). The crew was arrested and their vessel confiscated pending the outcome of the case (Sea Shepherd Log 1983, p. 4). The Sea Shepherd organisation was faced with a court ordered demand to pay $750,000 in fines and damages for the return of their ship (Scarce, 2007, p. 99; Watson 1994, pp. 25-26). Worried that they could not pay the fines and concerned that the ship would be given to the very whalers they fought and converted into a whaling vessel, Watson led some crew members aboard the vessel and sank it (Watson 1994, pp. 25-26).

Following the ramming of the Sierra, Watson made sure to publicize what he had done declaring: ‘there isn’t much point in ramming a whaler if you can’t tell the world that you did so. In a media culture, a thing just doesn’t happen unless the media covers it. We need to send a message loud and clear that whaling isn’t going to be tolerated any longer’ (Watson, 1994, p. 21).

6. Direct Actions Following the Sinking of the Sierra

After the deliberate ramming of the Sierra, Watson appears to have decided that the immediate and concrete results from such a strategy was the way forward. For example in 1992 the Sea Shepherds tried to sink the Nybrævena in the Lofoten Islands but were unable to complete their mission (The High North News, 1994). According to the Sea Shepherd no charges were brought against Watson or his crew by the Norwegian authorities due to the concern that any trial would only publicise the ongoing Norwegian whaling activities (Sea Shepherd Log, 1993, p. 4). In 1993, a similar attempt was made to sink the ship the Senet (Gressvik) but again was unsuccessful (The High North News, 1994).

Despite the SSCS’s professed approach of not targeting people for violence there have been a number of incidents where people have allegedly been hurt by the groups actions. In 1986, Sea Shepherd personnel allegedly used a line rifle, to shoot at Faroese police potentially endangering their lives. The SSCS maintain that their actions were a response to the police firing tear gas canisters at them (The High North News Extra, 1994).

In 2002 in Costa Rica, SSCS members led by Paul Watson came across an illegal shark finning operation, run by the Costa Rican ship the Varadero (Costa Rica, 2012). When interviewed about the incident, Captain Hammarstedt of the SSCS vessel said that at the urging of the Guatemalan authorities they took control of Varadero but that ‘the tables turned,’ when the Guatemalans dispatched a gunboat to arrest Captain Watson (Sharkwater DVD, 2006, 44 min). The SSCS fled the scene sailing to the Costa Rican port of Punto Arenas where Watson was charged with violating navigational regulations. The Sea Shepherd maintain that the charges were eventually dropped but later reinstated by another prosecutor, with an arrest warrant issued for Watson in October 2011 (Weston, 2012; Dowling, 2012). Subsequently the Varadero crew accused Watson of ramming their vessel and he was charged with attempted murder for his actions. However, the charges were initially dismissed when a video of the incident was shown to the prosecutor but the issue has recently become an issue again when Costa Rica sought to extradite Watson over this charge in 2012 (Malik, 2012).

In June 2010 it was alleged by a Maltese diver that he had his arm ripped by a fishing hook during a clash with SSCS activists who were trying to free caged tuna off the coast of Tripoli (Sansone, 2010). A second
diver claimed to have been bruised in the incident. However, SSCS dispute the claims declaring they were merely repelling a violent attack by the fishermen and Paul Watson declared to reporters there was no credible evidence that anyone had been injured (Sansone, 2010).

7. The Sea Shepherds vs. Japanese Whaling

For the last two decades the Sea Shepherd main battleground has been Antarctic water with the aim of ending the ongoing annual Japanese whaling that continues under the guise of 'scientific research' (International Convention of the Regulation of Whaling 1946, art VIII; Roeschke, 2009, p. 111; Hoek, 2010, pp. 167-168; Moffa, 2012, pp. 205-206). Under the scientific permit Japan awards itself annually, it kills over 1,400 total whales of different species and makes around USD $61 million a year from the domestic sale of whale meat (Hoek, 2010, pp. 169-170).

The Sea Shepherds continue to argue that such scientific research is merely a cover to allow commercial whaling to continue. The ongoing conflict between the two sides has become increasingly violent and confrontational in the last decade (Los Angeles Times 2010). In one of the more serious, and life threatening incidents, in the 2009/10 whaling season the Sea Shepherds alleged that the Japanese whaling vessel ShonanMaru #2 cut the SSCS trimaran vessel Ady Gil in two, leading to the ship sinking (Darby, 2010). The captain of the ship, Pete Bethune then accused the Japanese crew of ‘attempted murder’ of his crew (Bennett, 2010).

The situation escalated further when Pete Bethune, boarded a Japanese security ship on February 15th, 2010 in order to effect a citizens arrest on the ship’s captain for attempted murder of himself and his crew. The Japanese Captain did not acquiesce and Bethune found himself detained onboard and then arrested by the Japanese Coast Guard for trespass when the voyage finished in Japan (Yamaguchi, 2010).

8. Boarding the Japanese Whaling Fleet: Take 2

In the 2011/12 whaling season the SSCS aided three Australians, Geoffrey Tuxworth, Simon Peterffy and Glen Pendlebury from a group called Forest Rescue Australia, to board the whaling ship ShonanMaru #2 in protest against Japanese whaling in Antarctica (Sea Shepherd Conservation, 2012(b)). It appears that Watson was attempting to generate friction between the Japanese and Australian governments over the issue that would both generate media coverage and potentially damage diplomatic relations between the two states.

The SSCS then proclaimed that the boarders were being abducted from Australian territorial waters as the Japanese ship sailed for Antarctica (Sea Shepherd Conservation 2012(c)). However, the SSCS strategy was undermined when the Australian Attorney-General Nicola Roxon publicly stated that the three men had been detained in international waters (Sea Shepherd Conservation, 2012(d)). On January the 13th 2012 it was announced that the three men were transferred unharmed to the Australian vessel ACVOcean Protector (Sea Shepherd Conservation, 2012(e); Hansen, 2012). Paul Watson argued the stunt had been a great success since it concentrated global media attention on the ongoing Japanese whaling and started a global debate about the issue (Sea Shepherd Conservation, 2012(f); Sea Shepherd Conservation, 2012(g)).

9. Legal Attacks on the SSCS

The SSCS militant direct actions continue to draw legal countermeasures from their opponents and for the first time they threaten Watson’s freedom; his viability as head of the SSCS and the efficacy of the organization itself. In early December 2011, the SSCS and its leader Watson was sued in the U.S. District Court in Seattle by the whaling company Kyodo Senpaku Kaisha and the Institute of Cetacean Research (‘ICR’) that operates the whaling ships (The Australian, 2011(b)). The whaler’s spokesman Gavin Carter told the media that the goal of the lawsuit was not so much financial compensation but rather to bring about a cessation of SSCS activities in Antarctica (The Australian, 2011). Paul Watson argued that actions taken by the group were in self-defence and lawful. He further challenged the right of U.S. courts and the government to adjudicate, since as far as he was concerned, they had no legal authority to do so (Courier Mail, 2011).
In February 2012 the ICR lost the action whereby they sought an injunction against the SSCS's actions in the Antarctic designed to frustrate the Japanese whale hunt. Undeterred, the ICR appealed to US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit in Washington State that overturned the lower courts order and imposed a preliminary injunction on the SSCS (The Australian, 2012; Sea Shepherd Conservation, 2013; CBC News 2013).

The preliminary injunction remains in force until the Court rules on the merits of the ICR’s application (Mercopress, 2012; Sea Shepherd Conservation, 2013). The impact of the injunction’s scope is still unclear. The SSCS maintain that they will continue operations since the injunction only applies to the U.S. branch and not other entities such as SSCS Australia (Peterson, 2013; Mercopress, 2012). Paul Watson has stated that he will abide by the injunction’s terms but he was a part of the SSCS 2012/13 flotilla that challenged Japanese Antarctic whaling though it is unclear if he violated the injunction (CBC News, 2013; Sea Shepherd Conservation, 2013).

The SSCS has sought to have the US Supreme Court vacate the injunction arguing that the Ninth Circuit Court wrongly issued the injunction without any party filing a motion requesting such a decision and that the appeals Court wrongly ignored the superior initial decision (Peterson, 2013).

10. Paul Watson Arrested: threatened with extradition

The gravest threat yet to the SSCS organisation may be the ongoing legal proceedings to have Paul Watson extradited to Costa Rica to face charges over the decade old ‘attempted murder’ charge (Rosenthal, 2012). In December 2011, Costa Rica asked for Paul Watson to be arrested (Freeman, 2012). Paul Watson was subsequently arrested in Frankfurt, Germany on May 13th, 2012 while engaged on a speaking tour (Darby 2012). Costa Rica alleged that the Sea Shepherd vessel Farley Mowat committed attempted murder by ramming a fishing boat, the Varadero 1 in 2002 during the incident where the SSCS came upon Costa Rican fisherman alleging participating in an sharkfinning operation (Darby 2012(b)). The SSCS have consistently maintained that the incident involved merely an alleged violation of ship’s traffic laws (Darby 2012(c)).

The statute of limitations on the case was due to expire in June 2013 and Watson had been declared a fugitive by the Costa Rican courts (Darby, 2012 (c)). SSCS spokesman Mr Hammarstedt argued that an arrest warrant against Paul Watson over the matter had lapsed before being reactivated in October 2011 (Darby, 2012(d)). A higher Regional Court in Frankfurt ordered that since the alleged incident would have been a crime under German law and that the statute of limitations had not yet passed, Watson was to be held in custody until the extradition process was determined (AFP, 2012). On May the 18th 2012 Paul Watson was granted bail of EUR250,000 and ordered not to leave Germany and adhere to further conditions on his freedom (house arrest and report to the German police twice a day) (AFP, 2012; AFP, 2012(b)).

Watson argued that the process was an attempt by his enemies to ‘get him out of the way’ and ‘shut down our operations’ and that he was happy to be a ‘symbol of resistance’ from inside a jail cell (AFP 2012(b)). Watson claimed in an interview that he was afraid for his life if he was to be extradited to Costa Rica (The Age, 2012). Watson also found the timing of the extradition request highly suspicious pointing out it was brought in October 2011 at the same time the Japanese were suing him in a Seattle Court (The Age, 2012(b)). Watson also alleged that the Japanese government was putting pressure on the German government to carry out the extradition and argued that it was highly unusual to seek extradition for such a trivial offence where no-one was injured and no property damaged (AFP 2012(b); Agence France-Presse 2012).

11. Paul Watson Flees the Jurisdiction

On the 26th 2012 July Watson’s lawyer Oliver Wallasch, told the Frankfurt court that Watson had fled Germany for an ‘unknown destination’ (BBC News Europe, 2012). Japan subsequently admitted that it had sought the arrest and extradition of Paul Watson to Japan (AFP, 2012(c)). Watson will only say of his whereabouts: ‘I am presently in a place on this planet where I feel comfortable, a safe place far away from the scheming nations who have turned a blind eye to the exploitation of our oceans’ (Kennedy, 2012).
Following Paul Watson’s fleeing Germany the Frankfurt regional court has resumed extradition proceedings against him to send him to Costa Rica (AFP 2012(e)). Further an INTERPOL Red Notice has now been issued which requests that member states consider enforcing the arrest warrant issued by Costa Rica (Kennedy, 2012; INTERPOL N20120514/2012). Currently, Watson’s lawyer claims that Germany is not actively searching for Watson, leaving him free to continue his usual activities (Sea Shepherd Conservation, 2012). Not content to risk being arrested, Paul Watson has revealed that his strategy is to sit in international waters as long as possible aboard one of the Sea Shepherd’s four ships. Most legal experts agree it would be difficult for authorities to apprehend him while on the high seas (The Age, 2012(b)).

11.1 Paul Watson: International fugitive on the high seas?
Paul Watson now fears coming ashore even in what were previously friendly states to his cause like Australia and New Zealand since the INTERPOL warrant could see him arrested, The Australian Environment Minister Tony Burke however, issued a statement that the Australian government would not arrest Watson if found on Australian territory (Darby, 2013). Watson chose to stay onboard one of the SSCS vessels rather than risk being arrested by the Australian Federal Police (Perth Now, 2013). Watson now fears coming ashore even in what were previously friendly states to his cause like Australia and New Zealand since the INTERPOL warrant could see him arrested, The Australian Environment Minister Tony Burke however, issued a statement that the Australian government would not arrest Watson if found on Australian territory (Darby, 2013). Watson chose to stay onboard one of the SSCS vessels rather than risk being arrested by the Australian Federal Police (Perth Now, 2013). New Zealand officials apparently did conduct a search of incoming SSCS vessels for Watson but Watson was not there having evaded capture by switching ships at sea (Stylianou, 2013). The Japanese whalers show no signs of letting up in their desire to see Watson jailed with their representative Makoto Ito stating that he hoped Paul Watson would be, ‘arrested and brought to justice this year’ since Watson poses a serious threat to whaling crews (Westlake, 2012).

12. Conclusion
Watson has always been the leader of the SSCS but the recent legal setbacks threaten the group’s viability. Watson’s vision sustained it, built it to an ever-expanding entity that seems to be becoming more powerful year after year. The organisation has many volunteers eager to sail in protection of whales, a healthy financial position and the support of states like Australia that have backed their actions by providing ports and tacit approval for their actions. The SSCS has metastized into a global entity with different branches operating to some extent independently but on the evidence, still controlled by Watson and his immediate supporters.

Despite SSCS overtly aggressive actions and in part, because of their manipulation of international law, there had been up until recently few legal consequences for Watson and his crew (Carpari 2010, p. 1509; Hoek 2010, p. 162). There are a number of reasons why Watson has been so successful in evading major legal consequences for his actions. Western states have appeared wary to prosecute the SSCS since public opinion appears to broadly support their actions (Hoek 2010, p. 162; Moffa (2012), pp. 211-212)

Further, activities that, had they occurred on land, would have got the participants arrested, have occurred on the high seas due to a flaw at international law involving such activities. The SSCS, knowing that international law is both vague and weak, have capitalised on this vulnerability by conducting the majority of their campaigns in international waters (Roeschke, 2009, p. 108). Complex and overlapping laws and combined with the costly nature and problematic nature of enforcing international laws have coalesced to bring about a lacunae in international laws that have allowed the SSCS to operate (Hoek, 2010, pp. 183-184; Roeschke, 2009, p. 125). The SSCS have further been adroit in utilising the judicial systems in multiple states and the issue of disparate jurisdiction in international waters to their advantage (Khatchadourian, 2007, p. 66).

Watson has also been keenly aware of how to use the global media to promote his cause. Watson is also an advocate of what he describes as the Brer Rabbit Ploy: ‘if you have a political or moral advantage, then let the authorities know and believe that you want to be put on trial’. He has successfully used this strategy several times, asking to be arrested and charged on many occasions and claiming he is willing to martyr himself for the cause (Watson, 1993, p. 2; Watson, 1993, p. 91). However, with the recent Austrian case his dare has been met with Japan appearing willing to seek his extradition to face charges. The case has left Watson an international fugitive who can be arrested by any government willing to do so forcing him to stay mostly hidden aboard his ships in international waters to evade capture. Further Japan seems willing to use the U.S. court system in a concerted effort to prevent ongoing direct actions against its Antarctic whaling fleet.
However, it also clear that the SSCS is not willing to back down from this fight. The SSCS had its most successful year ever in terms of stopping whales killed by the Japanese Antarctic whaling fleet. Also it seems clear that the structure of the SSCS, with different incorporated arms in different nations, will still be able to continue the fight to stop ongoing whaling even if the U.S. entity is subject to ongoing legal action. (Sea Shepherd Conservation 2012).

Given that the SSCS is a top-down, hierarchical organization led by a charismatic leader, the imprisonment of Paul Watson may lead to the collapse of the organisation. However, given the size and stability of the group Watson has built it may very well be able to exist without his day-to-day leadership. Further, if Watson is captured and imprisoned in either Costa Rica or Japan, such an outcome would make him a martyr with global press attention to both his plight and his cause. Watson does not seem to relish this option preferring to stay in international waters to evade capture but he has stated on numerous occasion that he would go to jail if needed. If Watson is caught or if he surrenders himself, it may well be a case for Japan of 'careful what you wish for'.

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End of the Line? Paul Watson and the Future of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society


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