

Erwin Vermeulen Released from Jail: Final Verdict Scheduled for February 22

February 17, 2012-Wakayama, Japan- Following the closing arguments by both prosecution and defense, the trial court judge signed an order, presented by the defense, for **Sea Shepherd Cove Guardian** volunteer, **Erwin Vermeulen** to be released from custody pending the judge's verdict. The prosecution exercised their right to appeal to a higher court in order to force **Vermeulen** to remain in detention for the remainder of the trial. The trial judge took the extraordinary step of sending the paperwork to the higher court last night, thus ensuring that the appeal would be heard today. The higher court sided with the trial judge and denied the prosecution's appeal. **Vermeulen** has been released from detention and will rejoin his fellow **Cove Guardians**.

The prosecution has only asked for a fine of 100,000 Yen (\$1.300), should Erwin be found guilty. No jail time was requested. This demand for such a meager fine and no jail sentence, along with the strong case presented by the defense, exposed the fact that the prosecution's case is without merit and was poorly investigated. It has become clear that arresting **Vermeulen** and charging him with assault was politically motivated. The prosecution's appeal to keep the activist detained is blatant injustice and more proof of the underlying political motivation behind this case.

Erwin Vermeulen was in **Taiji, Japan** documenting the brutal dolphin slaughter that takes place annually in this small seaside town. He was falsely accused of "pushing" a dolphin resort employee and was arrested. **Vermeulen** was imprisoned for 64 days for these charges. He was held in solitary conditions, fed a diet of mostly white rice, and was denied contact with the outside world.

Vermeulen will be back in court on February 22 to hear the judge's verdict on the assault charges.

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