

Pete Bethune returns with no regrets

By MICHELLE SUTTON - Stuff

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New Zealand anti-whaling activist Pete Bethune landed in Auckland this morning, shaken and slightly subdued - but with no regrets.

"Yeah, sure it was worth it, I have no regrets," he said, blinking back tears and choking on emotion at Auckland International Airport about 9am.

Upon landing, he was taken away to a private area to be reunited with his wife Sharyn and two daughters, Danielle, 16, and Alycia, 13, after spending about four months in a Japanese gaol.

"It's good to have him home on New Zealand soil. We will try to keep him home I think," Sharyn said before Pete and his family headed away. He is due to have a family lunch later in the day.

When he walked through the international airport, Bethune was greeted by about three supporters and 20 media.

"I don't regret anything about what I did, but I don't know if it's made any difference," Bethune said.

He kept quiet about any future plans to continue the fight against whaling, and said he needed to discuss the situation with others, but plans were already brewing.

"There's a few things that I need to figure out and to have a chat with some people to figure out what I'm doing next," he said.

Bethune, 45, was deported back to New Zealand after receiving a two-year suspended sentence last Wednesday when he was convicted on five charges relating to clashes with Japanese whalers in Antarctic waters in which he hurled rancid butter and scaled a Japanese vessel.

Bethune was aboard the futuristic trimaran *Ady Gil* when it sank after a January 6 collision with the Japanese whaling fleet's security ship the *Shonan Maru II*.

A month later, Bethune boarded the Japanese ship to demand compensation but was detained and taken to Japan for prosecution, where he has been in custody since February.

Sea Shepherd bosses disowned Bethune part way through his Japanese trial for assaulting members of a Japanese whaling ship. They said having a bow and arrow on board his boat contravened Sea Shepherd regulations.

However, upon hearing Bethune's sentence, Sea Shepherd founder Paul Watson says it was all part of a ploy to help him.

Watson said even Bethune, was not told he was being cast out to make sure his angry reaction was authentic. Letters from his Japanese jail cell to his family and friends said he was gutted by the move.

New Zealand Sea Shepherd members were also left out of the loop and said they were dismayed.