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UCT professor honoured with a distinguished award by Emperor of Japan

University of Cape Town (UCT) applied mathematician and fisheries scientist Professor Emeritus Doug Butterworth has been awarded the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon by the Emperor of Japan for his contribution to the sustainable management of the country's fisheries.

The Order, established in 1875, is given for distinguished achievements in the advancement of one's field. Previous recipients include the American actor and film maker Clint Eastwood and French civil engineer Gustave Eiffel. Butterworth has been awarded the Order for his contribution to ensuring sustainable use of marine living resources by Japan, in particular southern bluefin tuna, one of the world's most valuable fisheries.

"I am very honoured to be recognised in such company and pay tribute to the colleagues who have assisted with my work," said Butterworth.

Butterworth, who also previously received South Africa's highest National Order of Mapungubwe (Silver), has been responsible for developing the scientific methods underlying the management of nearly all South Africa's major fisheries. He has made major contributions internationally to the analysis and management of bluefin tuna and various whale populations, as well as Antarctic krill and fisheries in Canada and the United States.

In the two decades that Butterworth has served on Japan's delegation to the Scientific Committee of the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna, he played a leading role in developing a management approach that saw the highly threatened resource under international litigation move to a situation where it is well on the route to recovery.

Commenting on Butterworth's contribution to the field, Sir John Beddington, former chief scientific adviser to the government of the United Kingdom, said that Butterworth was among one of a small group of people he would cite as having made the biggest contribution to renewable resource management over the past few decades.

Dr Ana Parma, leading South American fisheries scientist, added that Butterworth's impact had been amplified through training a generation of students, a number of whom are now leaders in the field. "I am very pleased to see his major contributions to fisheries science and management recognised internationally," she said.

Butterworth is recognised worldwide as a primary developer of the 'management procedure' approach to fisheries management, which allows the precautionary principle – which aims to minimise risks and protect fish stocks in the face of incomplete knowledge – to be incorporated into management decisions. This has led to South Africa being regarded as the world leader in the field. Internationally, he has successfully promoted the approach among several regional fishery management organisations. His advice on fisheries is widely sought, and he has helped more than 30 countries, fishing industry groupings and international fishery management organisations.

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