

# South Korea hints at scrapping whaling plan

July 11 2012

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A minke whale accidentally caught by nets cast by South Korean fishermen off the west coast is hung in the western port of Taeon in June 2012. South Korea said Wednesday it may scrap its fiercely criticised plan to resume "scientific" whaling if experts come up with non-lethal means to study the mammals in its waters.

South Korea said Wednesday it may scrap its fiercely criticised plan to resume "scientific" whaling if experts come up with non-lethal means to study the mammals in its waters.

"We may not conduct whaling for scientific research if there is another way to achieve the goal," Kang Joon-Suk, a senior official of the Ministry of Food, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, told reporters.

South Korea unveiled its plan at an International Whaling Commission (IWC) meeting last week in Panama, sparking an international outcry. It

would use a loophole in a global moratorium that permits killing of whales for "scientific" research.

[Greenpeace](#) described scientific whaling as "just thinly disguised [commercial whaling](#)". The United States, Australia and New Zealand also spoke out strongly against Seoul's plan.

South Korea cited what it called a significant increase in whale stocks in its waters and consequent damage to fisheries.



Graphic showing South Korea's exclusive economic zone, where legal whale hunting might resume, according to a plan announced by South Korean delegates at the International Whaling Commission in Panama.

If it goes ahead, it would be the fourth country to kill whales, excluding

allowances for [indigenous groups](#). Norway and Iceland openly defy the 1986 moratorium on commercial whaling, saying they believe stocks are healthy.

Japan already uses the loophole for scientific research, with the meat then going on dinner plates.

Kang said South Korea would fully consult international and domestic experts before and after presenting a detailed whaling programme to the IWC's [scientific committee](#), set to meet in South Korea in May next year.

"We will respect the committee's recommendations in making our decision," he said.

Yonhap news agency said Seoul could be backtracking in the face of strong criticism at home and abroad.

The ministry said [South Korea](#) would not consume meat from whales caught for scientific research if it goes ahead.

[Whale meat](#) is popular in the coastal town of Ulsan, which currently serves the remains of whales "accidentally" caught in nets.

Some 100 whales, most of them minke, are netted "accidentally" every year in South Korean waters. Critics say the high rate of bycatch raises suspicions that some whales may be killed intentionally.

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Citation: South Korea hints at scrapping whaling plan (2012, July 11) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-07-south-korea-hints-scrapping-whaling.html>

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