

# Australia in push to outlaw Japan whale hunt

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File picture shows Japan's whaling research ship the 'Nisshin Maru' leaving the port in Hiroshima prefecture, in December last year. Australia's Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus said Sunday he was hopeful the government would win its case against Japan's "scientific" whaling which begins this week in the International Court of Justice.

Australia's Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus said Sunday he was hopeful the government would win its case against Japan's "scientific" whaling which begins this week in the International Court of Justice.

Dreyfus, who will be in The Hague to lead the case for the final stretch of the three-week hearing which begins on June 26, said both sides had filed very lengthy legal and factual arguments with the court.

"Australia's views on whaling are well established -i we strongly oppose all commercial whaling, including so-called 'scientific' whale hunting by Japan," Dreyfus said.

"We believe Japan's so-called 'scientific' whaling is contrary to its international obligations and we want to see this practice brought to a halt once and for all."

The attorney-general said Australia and Japan, a key trading partner, remained friends despite their disagreement over whaling, which Tokyo says is carried out for scientific purposes.

"Australia and Japan agree the International Court of Justice is the best place to resolve differences between friends," Dreyfus said.

"Both countries value our strong bilateral relationship and the friendship forged between our nations over many years."

The upcoming hearings mark the final stage of proceedings initiated by Australia in 2010 and the government is hopeful of a decision before the start of the next southern hemisphere whaling season towards the end of the year.

"Of course we're hopeful of getting the result that we want," Dreyfus told reporters in Sydney.

In a statement, Dreyfus said more than 10,000 whales have been killed since 1988 as a result of Japan's whaling programmes in the Southern Ocean.

The annual killing of the whales for research in the Southern Ocean has provoked anger from conservationists, with militant activists from the Sea Shepherd conservation group tailing the Japanese fleet each year and occasionally clashing with the harpoon and factory ships.

This year the whaling mission off Antarctica logged a "record low" catch of the mammals, with the Japanese government blaming "unforgivable sabotage" by activists.

Japan's whale hunts have long drawn criticism from activists and foreign governments, but Tokyo defends the practice saying eating whale is part of the country's culinary tradition.

It says whales are studied as part of a bid by Japan's whaling research institute to prove their populations can sustain commercial whaling.

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