

Japan kills 251 minke whales in final Antarctic hunt

April 9 2014



This photo taken received from Sea Shepherd Australia Ltd on January 6, 2014 shows crew members walking amongst blood, allegedly from four minke whales, after they were cut up on the deck of the Japanese factory ship Nisshin Maru

Japan killed 251 minke whales during the 2014 Antarctic hunt, in what is expected to be the last "research whaling" mission in the Southern Ocean after an international court ruling.

According to data released by Japan's Fisheries Agency on Tuesday, the

catch was more than double last year's tally of 103 [minke whales](#), but much smaller than the target of 935.

The whalers caught no fin whales during the hunt, which ran between January 3 and March 13, the agency said.

Japan is a signatory to the International Whaling Commission (IWC), which bans commercial hunting, but has insisted its operation was research—even though it acknowledged the meat from the animals ended up on dinner tables.

Militant environmentalist group Sea Shepherd has annually sent its vessels to the Southern Ocean to confront the whalers, and has in the past taken credit for the vastly-reduced catch.

The United Nations' International Court of Justice in The Hague ruled last week that the programme was a commercial hunt disguised as science, vindicating claims by opponents, notably Australia.

In the wake of the verdict, Japan said it was cancelling the annual Antarctic mission for the first time in more than a quarter of a century.

Japan has another research whaling programme that operates in the northwestern Pacific.

This hunt, which is not affected by the court ruling, operates two excursions a year, in coastal waters and offshore, from early summer through autumn.

Last year's whaling in the area netted 58 minke whales in coastal waters and 132 mammals—including minke, sei and sperm whales—offshore.

Analysts say Japan will likely have to review this programme in the

Pacific in light of the UN [court ruling](#).

Japanese fishermen also catch a small number of [whales](#) in [coastal waters](#) under an IWC provision allowing for small-scale "indigenous whaling".

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