

Sixty percent of Japanese support whale hunt

April 22 2014



A handout picture taken by Japan's Institute of Cetacean Research (ICR) in 2013 shows a Bryde's whale on the deck of a Japanese whaling ship

Sixty percent of Japanese people support the country's whaling programme, but only 14 percent eat whale meat, a new poll showed Tuesday.

The survey comes less than a month after the United Nations' top court ruled the annual mission to the Southern Ocean by Japanese whaling

vessels was a commercial hunt masquerading as science in a bid to skirt an international ban.

A weekend opinion poll conducted by the liberal Asahi Shimbun newspaper showed that 60 percent of 1,756 voters supported the "research" whaling programme, against 23 percent who opposed it.

Asked how often they ate whale meat, however, only four percent said they eat "sometimes" and another 10 percent said they eat it "fairly infrequently".

Nearly half (48 percent) said they have not eaten it for "a long time", while 37 percent of respondents said they never eat whale meat.

Although not difficult to find in Japan, [whale meat](#) is not a regular part of most Japanese people's diet.

The survey was conducted a day after Japan said it would redesign its Antarctic whaling mission in a bid to make it more scientific, and confirmed it would press ahead with the "research whaling" in the northwestern Pacific. The fleet is due to depart on Saturday.



Handout photo taken on January 5, 2014 by Sea Shepherd Australia Ltd 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

Tokyo said there would be no hunting in the Southern Ocean in the 2014-15 season, but vessels would be there to carry out "non-lethal research". However, the announcement raised the possibility that harpoon ships would return the following year.

That would put Japan on a collision course with anti-whaling nations like Australia, which brought the case to the International Court of Justice.

Appetite for whale diminishing

Japan, a member of the IWC, has hunted [whales](#) under a loophole in a 1986 moratorium that allowed it to conduct lethal research on the

mammals, but has openly admitted that their meat made its way onto menus.

Tokyo has always maintained that it was intending to prove the [whale population](#) was large enough to sustain commercial hunting.

Some observers had predicted the Japanese government would use the cover of last month's court ruling to abandon what many have long considered the facade of a scientific hunt.

The latest poll said 40 percent of voters think the ICJ's verdict was "appropriate" against 39 percent who don't think so.

But Japan's minister of agriculture, forestry and fisheries, Yoshimasa Hayashi, said Friday the government would "submit a new research programme by this autumn to the International Whaling Commission (IWC), reflecting the criteria laid out in the verdict".

Like the United States, Japan extensively hunted whales in the 19th century, when they were a source of fuel and food.

But the country's taste for whalemeat has considerably diminished in recent decades as it has become richer and has been able to farm more of its protein.

However, powerful lobbying forces have ensured Tokyo continues to subsidise the hunt with taxpayers' money.

Meanwhile, public support has been mobilised in reaction to what some paint as cultural imperialism by Western environmentalists, particularly the aggressive actions of groups like Sea Shepherd.

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