

# Will world court ruling end Japan's whaling? (Update)

April 1 2014, by Mari Yamaguchi

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In this Thursday, March 27, 2014, packs of whale meat to be sold hang at a whale meat specialty store at Tokyo's Ameyoko shopping district. Japan's whaling in the Antarctic is at a crossroads after the International Court of Justice ordered it halted this week, saying it's not really science. The ruling upheld the argument that Japan's research whaling is a guise for commercial whaling. It cannot be appealed, but Japan has some other options to consider. (AP Photo/Shizuo Kambayashi, File)

Japan's whaling in the Antarctic is at a crossroads after the International Court of Justice ordered the program stopped. The court concluded the supposed scientific research program is actually a guise for commercial whaling. This week's ruling cannot be appealed, but Japan has other options to consider.

**Q:** Why does Japan see whaling as important?

**A:** Whale meat was an inexpensive source of protein in the past and was frequently served in school lunches instead of beef. Demand has declined and it isn't widely eaten now, but advocates of whaling say it remains part of Japan's traditional food culture. Nationalists strongly resist foreign criticism of the practice, saying Western nations were among the biggest whalers in the past and that eating whales is no different than eating cows or kangaroos.

**Q:** Is this the end of Japanese whaling?

**A:** No. The ruling only affects an Antarctic hunt, and Japan can continue research hunts of about 300 minke whales in the North Pacific and around the Japanese coast. Japan won a legal battle last year against the Sea Shepherd environmental group when a U.S. court ordered the group to stop harassing Japanese whalers in the North Pacific. Experts, however, say calls could grow for Japan's research program in the North Pacific to be scrutinized, too.

**Q:** Will this be the end of Japan's Antarctic hunts?

**A:** Not necessarily. Japan could come up with and seek approval for an alternative plan for research whaling in the Antarctic. Japanese fisheries minister Yoshimasa Hayashi said Tuesday that Japan will end the ongoing "JARPA II" program that was contested in the lawsuit filed by Australia, but left open the possibility of proposing an alternative. "We

are going to carefully examine the content of the ruling and decide what we'll do," he said. The ruling has little impact on this season's hunt, as the Japanese fleet of five whaling ships is almost finished and is set to return home within weeks.

**Q:** How might Japan continue whaling in the Antarctic?

**A:** Japanese fisheries officials have hinted they may come up with a new research program that would scale back the catch quota and specify research details and methods to justify it as scientific. Japan hunted between 300 and 440 minke whales in the Antarctic for nearly two decades after starting the research hunts in 1987. But in 2005, the country more than doubled the quota, inviting harsher protests. Experts say one possibility is to return to the earlier number, noting that the ruling found it problematic that the quota of more than 1,000 whales far exceeded the actual catch. During the 2012-13 season, Japan caught only 103 whales. The ruling did not touch on the legality of Japan's lower 1987-2004 catch quota, which could be a benchmark for a new program, possibly JARPA III.

**Q:** When will Japan decide what to do?

**A:** Probably soon. The next scientific committee meeting of the International Whaling Commission is set for May, and applications for research hunts for next season must be submitted 60 days in advance. If it takes longer for Japan to submit an application, it may have to skip the next season, which usually runs from December to early April. Fisheries minister Hayashi also said he would make a decision quickly.

**Q:** Will the ruling affect whale meat supply in Japan?

**A:** Japan already has a huge stockpile of whale meat because of a sharp fall-off in consumption. At the end of 2012, about 4,600 tons remained

in freezers at major Japanese ports. Planned imports of whale meat from Iceland later this year are also expected to keep it from disappearing from the market.

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