

Japan says to target Antarctic minke whale despite ban

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Tokyo was forced to abandon its 2013-14 hunt in March when the International Court of Justice (ICJ) said the annual expedition was a commercial activity masquerading as research.

But a new policy announced by the pro-whaling government on Tuesday hopes to bypass this ruling by giving the controversial mission a more scientific focus.

Whaling vessels will collect "data necessary to calculate the number of whale catch allowed (once commercial whaling resumes)," and "construct a model of the Antarctic Ocean ecosystem," an official of the Japan Fisheries Agency told AFP.

"We are thinking that we will only target Antarctic [minke whales](#) in the new plan," he said.

Minke [whales](#) are believed to be more numerous than the fin and [humpback whales](#) also harpooned in past missions.

Japan has hunted whales under a loophole in the 1986 global moratorium that allows lethal research on the mammals, but has made no secret of the fact that their meat ends up in restaurants and fish markets.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe sparked fury in anti-whaling nations in June when he said he would boost efforts towards restarting [commercial whaling](#), emphasising its importance in Japanese culture.

The Fisheries Agency plans to announce the submission of their modified hunt program at the annual International Whaling Commission (IWC) meeting later this month, and put it forward later in 2014.

"Collecting the necessary data requires lethal research, which was acknowledged in the ICJ ruling," the agency official said.

"We've yet to decide on the number of catch next year... We plan to submit the new plan to the IWC's scientific committee for approval in October or November," he said.

Past Antarctic expeditions have set a quota of 935 minke whales, with far lower numbers of fin and humpback whales targeted.

But a campaign of harassment by environmental group Sea Shepherd has drastically reduced the catch.

Two hunts, not covered by the ICJ ruling, have taken place since it was handed down.

One in July saw the slaying of 90 Sei whales and 25 Bryde's whales, whilst in June 30 Minke whales were killed as part of a coastal whaling hunt.

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