

Japan seeks to resume Antarctic whaling next year

September 3 2014, by Mari Yamaguchi



In this Jan. 5, 2014 file photo released by Sea Shepherd Australia, three dead minke whales lie on the deck of the Japanese whaling vessel Nisshin Maru as it travels through the Southern Ocean. Japan is seeking to resume Antarctic whaling next year under a revised research program that would involve fewer killings and only minke whale, following the U.N. top court's rejection to an earlier program, fisheries officials said Wednesday, Sept. 4. (AP Photo/Tim Watters, Sea Shepherd Australia, File)

Japan is seeking international support for its plans to hunt minke whales

in the Antarctic Ocean next year by scaling down the whaling research program the U.N. top court rejected earlier this year, fisheries officials said Wednesday.

Whaling for research purposes is exempt from the 1986 international ban on commercial whaling, and Japan has conducted hunts in the Antarctic and Pacific on that basis. But in March, the International Court of Justice ruled the Antarctic program wasn't scientific as Japan had claimed and must stop.

Japan's Fisheries Agency is working on a revised program to be submitted to the International Whaling Commission's scientific committee around November. The agency will announce its intention and basic plan at the Sept. 15-18 IWC meeting in Slovenia and will continue to finalize catch targets and other details over the next few weeks.

The new program will address the problems cited by the court, an agency official said on condition of anonymity, citing department rules. The court said Japan's Antarctic program produced little actual research and failed to explain why it needed to kill so many whales for the study.

Approval from the IWC's scientific committee isn't mandatory, but any attempt by Japan to resume whaling would be likely to face intense scrutiny over whether it complies with the court ruling.

Japan also plans to no longer hunt fin and humpback whales, after hardly catching any of those two species in the past nine years.

After steadily fulfilling its Antarctic catch target of 440 for 17 years, Japan more than doubled it to 935 minke whales in 2005. It came close to the target only the following year and has fallen since, mainly because the demand for whale meat has declined significantly at home.

The government also has had to keep spending tax money to sustain whaling operators. Violent protests by anti-whaling group Sea Shepherd also contributed to the declining catch.

During the 2013-14 season, Japan caught 251 minke whales in the Antarctic, or just a quarter of its target, and 224 others in the northern Pacific program, which isn't as controversial. Japan also hunts more than 160 whales along its coast, outside of the IWC oversight.

Japan will go to the Antarctic later this year, but only for nonlethal research, the official said.

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