

Japan to file new research whaling plan 'this year' (Update)

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An undated handout photo released on February 7, 2008 shows a whale being dragged on board a Japanese ship after being harpooned in Antarctic waters

Japan said Wednesday it would file a plan by the end of the year for the resumption of its controversial Antarctic whaling programme, ruled invalid by the UN's highest court in March.

Tokyo's representative to the International Whaling Commission's (IWC) 65th meeting, Joji Morishita, said his country would be "open and

transparent" in its bid, and file a new plan by late 2014.

The country's Antarctic hunt has dominated a disputed agenda for the commission's first meeting since the International Court of Justice found in March that Japan abused a scientific exemption to a commercial whaling ban to hunt the cetaceans for their meat.

Japan cancelled its 2014-15 Antarctic hunt after the ruling, but has said it intends to resume "research whaling" in 2015-16.

It killed more than 250 minke whales in the Antarctic in the 2013-14 season and 103 the previous year.

It also conducts hunts in the name of science in the Northwest Pacific, where it killed 132 whales in 2013, and off the Japanese coast, where it caught 92.

Morishita insisted Japan would abide by the ICJ ruling which "imposed a number of conditions on the use of lethal research methods".

These included "whether the design and implementation of any research programme is reasonable... the scale of a programme's use of lethal sampling, the methodology used, target sample sizes and actual takes, the research programme's time frames and scientific output," he told the conference.



A Japanese whaling fleet departs Ayukawa port in Ishinomaki City on April 26, 2014 under tight security by the Japan Coast Guard

Non-lethal interlude

In the meantime, Japan "will go to Antarctica this season to conduct its programme with non-lethal means," said delegation spokesman Glenn Inwood.

Japan has no formal bid before the commission, but was forced into the spotlight by a New Zealand proposal that no permits be issued for whaling research in future without proof of scientific necessity.

As countries debated the wording of the resolution Wednesday, conservation group Humane Society International rejected a compromise that dilutes the ICJ decision.

"Japan is bound to honour the ICJ decision. The IWC should expect no less," the organisation's Kitty Block, attending the meeting as an observer, told AFP.

Though it would be frowned upon, nothing actually prevents Japan from whaling even if the commission's scientific committee fails to give it the green light.

"All of Japan's previous research programmes have been communicated to the IWC scientific committee, the IWC itself and the global public in a transparent manner," Japan's alternate commissioner Hideki Moronuki told AFP.

"Japan will continue to take this approach in the future. One of the major challenges will be informing the global public on the importance of science-driven marine mammal management... and Japan's aspirations for sustainable hunting of whales for food."

Other contentious issues yet to be settled include a proposal for the creation of a whale sanctuary in the South Atlantic, and a bid by Japan to be allowed small-scale commercial whaling off its own coast.

Iceland, meanwhile, came under fire from several countries for breaking a ban on commercial hunting.

"Iceland is well known as a conservationist country, but I am deeply disappointed with Iceland for continuing whaling," said US commissioner Ryan Wulff. "We urge Iceland to seriously reconsider commercial whaling."

Iceland and Norway issue commercial permits under objections or reservations registered against the IWC's whaling ban.

Of more than 1,600 whales killed in total in 2013, Norway took 594 and Iceland 169.

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