

Iceland whale meat shipment to Japan sparks protests

May 19 2015



The tails of two 35-tonne fin whales are bound to a Hvalur HF boat off the coast of Hvalfjörður, north of Reykjavík, on the western coast of Iceland on June 19, 2009

Environmentalists reacted angrily Tuesday to a controversial shipment of fin whale meat to Japan by an Icelandic whaling company, saying it flouted international conservation agreements.

The Icelandic whaling company Hvalur HF plans to ship 1,700 tonnes of whale meat via Luanda in Angola, repeating a similar controversial delivery of 2,000 tonnes last year which sparked protests along its route.

"This is an [animal welfare](#) issue. There is no humane way to kill animals of that size... there is no need for this meat and certainly no need for Iceland's economy or fisheries industry to have this," said Sigursteinn Masson, Iceland spokesman at the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) told AFP.

"This is a shipment that faces strong international opposition... Commercial whaling is a very isolated business—we want to see the end of it, as does most of the world."

According to Icelandic daily Eyjan the meat was loaded aboard a vessel known as Winter Bay near the Icelandic capital Reykjavik two weeks ago but its departure has been delayed due to a mechanical failure.

Kristjan Loftsson, chief executive of Hvalur HF, confirmed local media reports of the pending shipment which he said was "not illegal".

"Iceland made a reservation on the ban so it is not bound by it," he said.

Iceland and Norway are the only nations that openly defy the International Whaling Commission's (IWC's) 1986 ban on hunting whales.

Icelandic whalers caught 137 [fin whales](#) and 24 minkes in 2014, according to the anti-whaling group WDC, compared to 134 fin whales and 35 minkes in 2013.

Japan has used a legal loophole in the ban that allows it to continue hunting the animals in order to gather scientific data.

But it has never made a secret of the fact that the whale meat from these hunts often ends up on dining tables.

Consumption of [whale meat](#) in Japan has fallen sharply in recent years while polls indicate that few Icelanders regularly eat the meat.

In September the European Union, the US and several other countries issued a statement calling on Iceland to halt [commercial whaling](#), particularly of fin whales.

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Citation: Iceland whale meat shipment to Japan sparks protests (2015, May 19) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-05-iceland-whale-meat-shipment-japan.html>

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