

Japan fleet returns from Antarctic whale hunt

March 24 2016



Workers disembark from a whaling ship at the port of Shimonoseki in western Japan on March 24, 2016

A Japanese whaling fleet returned home Thursday from its annual Antarctic hunt, the government said, a trip that angered environmentalists and nations opposed to the slaughter.

The ships had set sail for the Southern Ocean in December, with plans to kill 333 [minke whales](#), despite a worldwide moratorium and opposition

led by Australia and New Zealand.

Japan insists it is carrying out scientific research.

The 2015/16 hunt came after a hiatus prompted by a 2014 ruling by the United Nations' International Court of Justice, which said the annual hunt was a commercial venture masquerading as science.

The fleet arrived early Thursday at Shimonoseki port in western Japan, an official at Japan's Fisheries Agency said, but declined immediately to provide further details, including on the size of the catch.

Despite the moratorium and opposition from usually-friendly nations, Japan persists in hunting whales, using a loophole in the International Whaling Commission's 1986 ban on [commercial whaling](#) that allows for research.

Tokyo claims it is trying to prove the whale population is large enough to sustain a return to commercial hunting, and says it has to kill the mammals to carry out its research properly.

However, it makes no secret of the fact that whale meat ends up on dinner tables and is served up in school lunches.

In response to the ICJ ruling, Japan's 2014-15 mission carried out only "non-lethal research" such as taking skin samples and doing headcounts.

Japan has hunted whales for centuries, and their meat was a key source of protein in the immediate post-World War II years when the country was desperately poor.

But consumption has dramatically declined in recent decades, with significant proportions of the population saying they "never" or "rarely"

eat [whale meat](#).

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