

Anti-whalers enlist fast ship to fight off Japanese

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In this year's hunt the whaling fleet returned to Japan in March having killed more than 300 whales

Marine conservationists announced Tuesday they will for the first time be able to outrun the Japanese whaling fleet in the upcoming annual battle to protect the giant mammals in the icy Southern Ocean.

Sea Shepherd Global is adding a fast new vessel to its whale defence campaign in Antarctic waters starting this December.

"Disappointed by the lack of action from the international community, Sea Shepherd Global is preparing to return to the Southern Ocean to protect the whales with a new patrol vessel, the Ocean Warrior," it said in a statement.

Built with financial support from the Dutch, British and Swedish lotteries, Ocean Warrior could make a real difference, Sea Shepherd said.

"For the first time we will have the speed to catch and outrun the Japanese harpoon ships, knowing speed can be the deciding factor when saving the lives of whales," said the group's chief executive Captain Alex Cornelissen.

Japan claims to conduct vital scientific research using a loophole in an international whaling ban, but makes no secret that the mammals end up on dinner plates.

Tokyo was forced to call off the 2014-15 hunt after the International Court of Justice ruled its annual Antarctic foray was commercial, masquerading as science.

Japan's hunt for minke whale

Smallest of the great baleen whale family, main target of Japanese hunters

Two known species

- Antarctic minke whale (*Balaenoptera bonaerensis*)
- Northern or common minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*)

Diet:

Feed on krill almost exclusively in the Antarctic but common minke whales eat fish and invertebrates

Like all whales the minke must surface to breath oxygen from the air through two **blowholes**

Antarctic minke whales have larger skulls than common minke wales

Lifespan: Over 20 years
Weight: Up to 10 tonnes
Length: 7-11 m

Main threats

- ▶ Whaling
 - Japan used a loophole in 1986 IWC* moratorium that allowed killing of whales for "scientific research".
 - **The International Court of Justice ordered a halt to the hunt in March 2014**
 - Japanese whaling fleet set sail on Dec 1, 2015 to resume culls
- ▶ Bycatches in fishing nets and traps
- ▶ Habitat disturbance

*International Whaling Commission

Distribution of Antarctic minke whale



Japan's hunt for minke whale

But the hunt resumed in late 2015, with the fleet returning to Japan in March this year after having killed more than 300 whales.

Sea Shepherd vowed to throw everything at the Japanese in a bid to stop the slaughter.

"If we cannot stop whaling in an established whale sanctuary, in breach

of both Australian federal and international laws, then what hope do we have for the protection of the world's oceans?" said Sea Shepherd Australia's managing director Jeff Hansen.

"We must make a stand and defend whales with everything we've got."

The upcoming disruption campaign has been named Operation Nemesis after the Greek goddess of inescapable justice, Sea Shepherd Australia's chairman Peter Hammarstedt added.

Japan has sought to close down the anti-whaling campaigns in court saying the activists ram their ships, snare propellers with ropes and harass crew with paint and stink bombs.

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