

World body agrees to stricter oversight of Japan's whale hunts

October 27 2016, by Mariëtte Le Roux



Japan cancelled its 2014/15 whale hunt, only to resume it the following year, killing an estimated 300-plus animals

The world's whaling watchdog voted Thursday to conduct stricter reviews of whales killed under an exemption to a 30-year-old moratorium which Japan's critics say it abuses to hunt for meat.

The resolution, opposed by Japan and fellow whalers Norway and Iceland, was adopted by 34 "yes" votes to 17 against, at the 66th meeting

of the International Whaling Commission (IWC).

It is not legally binding on members of the commission, which has no policing or penalty function.

Submitted by Australia and New Zealand, the resolution seeks to "improve" the review process for scientific whaling programmes—which Japan alone conducts, netting more than 15,000 of the marine mammals since 1986.

"We welcome this result as an important reaction to Japan unilaterally issuing its own permits for so-called scientific whaling," said Matt Collis of the International Fund for Animal Welfare.

"We all know that scientific whaling is sham science, and simply commercial whaling by another name."

Japan defended its annual Southern Ocean whale hunt, saying it was gathering scientific data.

The country insisted its actions were in keeping with a 2014 ruling of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which found that permits issued by Japan were "not for purposes of scientific research" and instructed the country to halt its JARPA II programme.

Whale populations

Blue Whale

Maximum length (in metres)



Maximum weight
180 tonnes

Main threats
Noise and chemical pollution

Population
10,000 - 25,000

Hunting
Collision with vessels



Common Rorqual

Maximum length (in metres)



Maximum weight
120 tonnes

Main threats
Noise and chemical pollution

Population
33,000

Hunting
Collision with vessels
Climate change



Conservation status



Humpback Whale

Maximum length (in metres)



Maximum weight
40 tonnes

Main threats
Noise and chemical pollution

Population
63,000

Fishing
Collision avec des navires



Southern right whale

Maximum length (in metres)



Maximum weight
90 tonnes

Main threats
Collision with vessels

Population
7,500

Fishing
Climate change



Sources: Whale and Dolphin Conservation, IUCN, Centro de Conservación Cetáceos (CICe), UNEP, AFP

Endangered whales

"Reports oftentimes say (that) irrespective of the ICJ judgment Japan started the research, or in violation of the ICJ judgment... and that's not true," Japan's commissioner to the IWC, Joji Morishita told fellow delegates.

In the judgment of the court itself, "it is clear that the ICJ assumes there can be future research activities," he insisted.

'Deep disappointment'

"The ICJ also said... that the use of lethal sampling per se is not

unreasonable in relation to the research objectives," Morishita added.

After the court ruling, Japan cancelled its 2014-15 hunt, only to resume it the following year under a new programme called NEWREP-A (New Scientific Whale Research Program in the Antarctic Ocean).

It killed 333 minke whales in the Southern Ocean—many of them pregnant, according to observers.

The Southern Ocean hosts one of two whale sanctuaries in the world.

The issue is a deeply divisive one at the biennial meetings of the IWC, which turned 70 this year.



Protesters demonstrate during the 66th International Whaling Commission (IWC) meeting in Portoroz, Slovenia, on October 24, 2016

The meat from Japan's hunts ends up on supermarket shelves and in restaurants, in line with an IWC stipulation that whales taken for research must be eaten.

Under the IWC moratorium, all whaling other than for aboriginal subsistence, or science, is prohibited.

Japan hunts under the science exemption, while Norway and Iceland lodged formal objections to the moratorium and continue commercial hunts.

New Zealand's commissioner Amy Laurenson expressed her country's "deep disappointment" with Japan's resumption of whaling without IWC approval.

Japan had referred NEWREP-A to the IWC's scientific committee, but started whaling before it could complete a review, she said, and accused Tokyo of sidelining the commission.

"On the basis of the information the commission has before it, it is clear that NEWREP-A is not in fact for purposes of scientific research," the commissioner argued, and called on Japan to "cease the lethal component of NEWREP-A".

"Japan has still not justified the use of lethal sampling," she said.

For Kitty Block of the Humane Society International, Thursday's vote shrank the scientific whaling "loophole".

"With its continued defiance and its unfettered whaling, Japan is not just killing whales but making itself a true outlier in the community of nations," she said.

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