

# Japan to resume commercial whaling, but not in Antarctic

December 26 2018, by Mari Yamaguchi

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In this September, 2017, photo, a minke whale is unloaded at a port after a whaling for scientific purposes in Kushiro, in the northernmost main island of Hokkaido. Japan says it is leaving the International Whaling Commission to resume commercial hunts but says it will no longer go to the Antarctic to hunt. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said Wednesday, Dec. 26, 2018, that Japan's commercial whaling will be limited to its territorial and economic

waters.(Kyodo News via AP, File)

Japan announced Wednesday that it is leaving the International Whaling Commission to resume commercial hunts for the animals for the first time in 30 years, but said it would no longer go to the Antarctic for its much-criticized annual killings.

Japan switched to what it calls research whaling after the IWC imposed a moratorium on commercial whaling in the 1980s, and now says stocks have recovered enough to resume commercial hunts.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said Japan would resume commercial whaling in July "in line with Japan's basic policy of promoting sustainable use of aquatic living resources based on scientific evidence."

He added that Japan is disappointed that the IWC—which he said is dominated by conservationists—focuses on the protection of whale stocks even though the commission has a treaty mandate for both whale conservation and the development of the whaling industry.

"Regrettably, we have reached a decision that it is impossible in the IWC to seek the coexistence of states with different views," he said at a news conference.

Suga said the commercial hunts would be limited to Japan's territorial waters and its 200-mile (323-kilometer) exclusive economic zone along its coasts. He said Japan would stop its annual whaling expeditions to the Antarctic and northwest Pacific oceans. Non-signatory states are not allowed to do so, according to Japanese Fisheries Agency officials.

The IWC imposed the moratorium on commercial whaling three decades ago due to a dwindling whale population. In 1987, Japan switched to what is called research whaling, but the program has been criticized as a cover for commercial hunting since the meat is sold on the market at home.



In this March 27, 2014, file photo, packs of whale meat to be sold hang at a whale meat specialty store at Tokyo's Ameyoko shopping district. Japan says it is leaving the International Whaling Commission to resume commercial hunts but says it will no longer go to the Antarctic to hunt. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said Wednesday, Dec. 26, 2018, that Japan's commercial whaling will be limited to its territorial and economic waters. (AP Photo/Shizuo Kambayashi, File)

Japanese officials said Japan, even after leaving the whaling convention,

will remain as an observer to the IWC and plans to continue participating in the group's scientific meetings and annual conferences.

The environmental group Greenpeace condemned Wednesday's announcement and disputed Japan's view that whale stocks have recovered, and noted that ocean life is being threatened by pollution as well as overfishing.

"The declaration today is out of step with the international community, let alone the protection needed to safeguard the future of our oceans and these majestic creatures," Sam Annesley, executive director of Greenpeace Japan, said in a statement. "The government of Japan must urgently act to conserve marine ecosystems, rather than resume commercial whaling."

Australia's government, often a vocal critic of Japan's whaling policies, said in a statement that it was "extremely disappointed" with Japan's decision to quit the commission.

However, New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters joined Australia in welcoming Japan's withdrawal from the southern ocean. Japan was the only country with an ambition to return to commercial whaling in the Antarctic Ocean.

Japanese Fisheries Agency official and longtime IWC negotiator Hideki Moronuki said Japan would use the IWC's method to carefully determine a catch quota on the basis of science, but declined to give an estimate. He said Japan plans to use seven existing whaling hubs on the Pacific coast for the upcoming commercial hunts.

Moronuki said Japan is starting with a modest plan because it has to figure out if or how commercial whaling can be a viable industry. "What's most important is to have a diverse and stable food supply," he



said.



In this Sept. 2013, photo, a minke whale is unloaded at a port after a whaling for scientific purposes in Kushiro, in the northernmost main island of Hokkaido. Japan says it is leaving the International Whaling Commission to resume commercial hunts but says it will no longer go to the Antarctic to hunt. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said Wednesday, Dec. 26, 2018, that Japan's commercial whaling will be limited to its territorial and economic waters.(Kyodo News via AP)

The Fisheries Agency said Japan plans to catch three kinds of whale that are believed to have sufficient stocks—minke, sei and Bryde's.

Japan has hunted whales for centuries, but has reduced its catch following international protests and declining demand for whale meat at home. The withdrawal from the IWC may be a face-saving step to stop

Japan's ambitious Antarctic hunts and scale down the scope of whaling to around the Japanese coasts.

Japan slashed its annual quota in the Antarctic by about one third after the International Court of Justice ruled in 2014 that the country's research whaling program wasn't as scientific as it had argued. Japan currently hunts about 600 whales annually in the Antarctic and the Northern Pacific.

Fisheries officials have said Japan annually consumes thousands of tons of whale meat from the research hunts, mainly by older Japanese seeking a nostalgic meal. It's a fraction of the country's whale meat supply of about 200,000 tons before the IWC moratorium. Critics say they doubt commercial whaling can be a sustainable industry because younger Japanese may not view the animals as food.

Nonetheless, Japanese lawmakers want to promote whales not only as a source of protein but as part of Japan's cultural tradition.

"We hope the resumption of commercial whaling will lead to the economic revitalization of (whaling) communities," Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Takamori Yoshikawa told a meeting of his ruling party's whaling committee.

Kazutaka Sangen, mayor of Taiji, a central Japanese town known for dolphin hunts, welcomed the decision and vowed to stick with scientific way of stock management so that Japan's position on whaling can gain understanding from the international community.

Suga said that Japan would notify the IWC of its decision by Dec. 31 and that it remains committed to international cooperation on proper management of marine life even after its IWC withdrawal.

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