

# Activists petition court to halt Japan dolphin hunt

May 17 2019

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The lawsuit is the first-ever legal challenge to the hunt in the town of Taiji

Campaigners on Friday urged a court in Japan to halt so-called "drive hunting" of dolphins in the country as part of an unprecedented lawsuit that argues the practice violates Japanese law.

The plaintiffs argued before the court that the [hunting](#) method is cruel, and also that the capture of dolphins for sale to aquariums cannot be deemed a traditional cultural practice, said Kyoko Yoshida, who is representing the activists.

The lawsuit, filed in February, is the first-ever [legal challenge](#) to the hunt in the town of Taiji, in Japan's western Wakayama prefecture, the plaintiffs say.

The town was thrust into the international spotlight by the Oscar-winning documentary "The Cove", which filmed the process of "drive hunting," whereby fisherman herd dolphins into a cove by beating on boats to disorient them.

The panicked animals can get tangled in nets, suffocate and drown, and can also be injured or killed when they smash into rocks, activists say.

Other dolphins are killed when fisherman thrust a long metal rod repeatedly into the body to damage the [spinal cord](#), a practice activists consider excessively cruel.

Many in Japan felt the film unfairly targeted the town's fishing community, but others were horrified by the disturbing footage.

The plaintiffs want the governor of Wakayama to revoke a three-year drive hunting permit in Taiji.

But defenders of the hunt say dolphins have long been a traditional source of meat and call the practice an important part of local culture.

They also point out that dolphins are not endangered.

Activists say an increasing number of dolphins are also being trapped

and sold live to aquariums as demand rises from China or elsewhere.

The plaintiffs argue that the hunting method violates Japan's animal welfare act, which stipulates animals shall not be abused or killed unnecessarily and that—when they must be killed—their pain must be minimised.

Their suit challenges the way the hunt is carried out, rather than all kinds of dolphin hunting.

It also claims fishermen are catching more dolphins than allowed by legal caps.

Contacted by AFP, a Wakayama prefectural official declined to comment.

"We've been hunting [dolphins](#) for decades, and I don't think we are doing something illegal," Yoshifumi Kai, a senior official with the fisherman's union in Taiji, told AFP.

He declined to comment further.

Japan has courted controversy with continued hunting of whales, a rare piece of provocative diplomacy for the country, which has generally pursued an uncontroversial foreign policy since its World War II defeat.

It sparked outrage in December when it decided to withdraw from the International Whaling Commission, saying it would return to commercial whaling as part of its cultural heritage.

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Citation: Activists petition court to halt Japan dolphin hunt (2019, May 17) retrieved 28 July

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