

Japan's whale kill 'frustrating' – marine researcher

6 September 2018



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As Japan comes under fire from international conservation groups alleging more than 50 minke whales were killed inside Antarctic's Ross Sea Marine Protected Area, New Zealand scientists say important research on whale populations is being undertaken without the need to hunt.

Associate Professor Rochelle Constantine from the University of Auckland's School of Biological Sciences says a Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment and The Pew Charitable Trusts-funded science research trip earlier this year provided important new non-lethal data on Antarctica's [whale populations](#).

"One of the most exciting finds from the trip was a mother-calf pair near Scott Island, the same mother with a different calf was tagged in 2012 in New Caledonia" she says. "Our collaborative research shows how important this region is to whale populations."

Japan hunts [whales](#) under a clause in the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling that allows for the killing of whales for

research purposes. The Japanese have come in for harsh criticism and conservation groups were expected to make their opposition clear at the International Whaling Commission meeting in Brazil this week. New Zealand is a member of the Commission and has been a vocal critic of Japan.

Dr. Constantine says the Ross Sea region, an area that includes Antarctica's largest Marine Protected Area, is important for baleen whales feeding on krill. Whilst scientists know that krill is an important prey for [baleen whales](#), it was unknown whether humpback whales from the genetically distinct breeding grounds of east Australia and Oceania come together.

The genotype and photo-identification results reveal that there is mixture of whales from New Caledonia, Tonga and east Australia. These populations are recovering at different rates with some more vulnerable than others, so we need to consider this when developing protection measures.

"We have been really pleased with the results of this research which shows how important the Antarctic region is to whale species and we need to make sure these fragile populations are free from human threats," she says.

"It is very frustrating and disappointing that the Japanese continue to kill [minke whales](#) for research purposes and it is important that countries opposed to Japan's actions, including New Zealand, continue to raise opposition to what is an entirely unnecessary research programme."

Provided by University of Auckland

APA citation: Japan's whale kill 'frustrating' – marine researcher (2018, September 6) retrieved 14 October 2019 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-09-japan-whale-frustrating-marine.html>

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