

The world meets to discuss provisions on whale hunting, vote on new whale sanctuary

Nick Whigham



This January 2014 photos shows three dead minke whales on the deck of the Japanese whaling vessel Nisshin Maru in the Southern Ocean. Picture: Tim Watters, Sea Shepherd Australia

JAPAN and other whaling nations are facing increased international pressure to curtail the bloody practice of plundering the world's oceans of its whale populations.

More than 80 nations will square off in Slovenia over the fate of the world's remaining whales as the International Whaling Commission (IWC) meets this week.

The IWC is a global body charged with the conservation of whales and the management of whaling. It holds a meeting for representatives from its 88 member governments to discuss the state of global whale populations every two years.

The event has already commenced but this week the stage is set for a heated battle between nations who are deeply divided along pro- and anti-hunting lines.

The biggest bones of contention are Japan's yearly whale hunt in the name of science, which critics insist is for dinner tables instead, and a proposal for the establishment of a South Atlantic sanctuary to protect the majestic marine mammals.

Hunting nations Japan, Norway and Iceland are traditionally pitted against much of the rest of the world at the biennial meetings, which seek to balance issues of national sovereignty, subsistence rights and culture with conservation of Earth's natural bounty.

Australian Environment Minister Josh Frydenberg will attend and use the forum to call on the global body to take a tougher stance on so-called scientific whaling programs in a bid to rein in Japan's slaughtering of whales. "For too long, the commission has deferred responsibility for so-called scientific whaling to its scientific committee," Mr Frydenberg said on Friday ahead of travelling to the meeting.

"The commission must be more engaged on this important and divisive issue and form its own conclusions."



*A whale being dragged on board a Japanese ship after being harpooned in Antarctic waters*Source:AFP

SUSHI OR SCIENCE?

Whales face a growing number of perils from meat hunters and accidental ship strikes to getting snared in fishing gear.

Despite international condemnation, Japan continues to hunt large numbers of whales under the guise of doing scientific research but critics say the sole purpose is to stock Japanese supermarkets — although an IWC stipulation does state that whales taken for science must be eaten.

Conservationists are desperately hoping to protect the animals as many environmentalists view the hunting of whales as a cruel practice.

"Whaling has no place in the 21st century. It's outdated, it's thoroughly inhumane," Claire Bass of Humane Society International told the AFP news agency from Slovenia.

“There is no humane way to kill whales at sea,” she said, pointing out that many die long drawn-out deaths from horrific wounds inflicted by harpoons with explosive tips.

The only commission-sanctioned way to catch whales is with an aboriginal subsistence whaling licence — issued to indigenous communities in North America, Russia, Greenland, and the Caribbean nation of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

Japan sets its own quotas for what it says are scientific hunts, while Norway and Iceland do commercial hunts under legal loopholes.

In March this year, a Japanese whaling expedition killed 333 whales, including about 200 pregnant cows.

The hunt drew the ire of the Australian government which threatened legal action.

In 2008 the Australian federal court found Japanese whaling in the southern Antarctic sanctuary to be in contravention of Australian law. Japanese whaling company Kyodo was fined \$1 million in 2015 but attempts to attain the money have so far proved futile and Japan continues to defy international efforts to curtail its whaling programs.



Crew aboard Japanese harpoon whaling ship, the Yushin Maru No. 3, fire a shotgun to kill a minke whale while hauling it in from the Ross Sea in Antarctica in 2009. Picture: Animal PlanetSource:Supplied

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the global moratorium on commercial whaling and 70 years since the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling was made.

At least 45 species of whales, dolphins and porpoises are found in Australian waters and Mr Frydenberg says the government takes seriously its obligations to protect them.

Another divisive issue on the agenda at the IWC meeting is a proposal by Argentina, Brazil, Gabon, South Africa and Uruguay — countries which

depend on whale-watching tourist dollars — to create a 20 million-square kilometre South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary.

Member states will vote on the proposal later this week. However it is unlikely to pass as the bid — which requires a 75 per cent majority to pass — has failed at several previous meetings.

Conservationists are championing the idea.

“The creation of (a) South Atlantic Whale Sanctuary would be a huge milestone for whale protection,” Greenpeace whale expert John Frizell said.

“With the multitude of problems facing these magnificent creatures, they need healthy oceans and they certainly do not need a return to commercial whaling.”

- With AF



A mother whale and her calf being dragged on board a Japanese ship after being harpooned in Antarctic waters. Picture: Australian Customs ServiceSource:AFP



Sea Shepherd crew members hurl a bottle of butyric acid (rotten butter) at Japanese harpoon whaling ship, the Yushin Maru No. 1, as the Sea Shepherd helicopter flies overhead. Picture: Adam Lau/Sea Shepherd Conservation SocietySource:Supplied

Webpage:

<http://www.news.com.au/technology/science/animals/the-world-meets-to-discuss-provisions-on-whale-hunting-vote-on-new-whale-sanctuary/news-story/b5e5282612a465e1a46a0be96a0b87da>