

## Why are some countries still whaling?

Written by EarthTalk® E - The Environmental Magazine  
Thursday, 09 August 2012 02:38

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Pictured: Minke whale on a stick, at the Sea Baron restaurant in Reykjavik Harbour area, Iceland.

Dear EarthTalk: Commercial whaling was banned around the world years ago, but some nations continue to hunt whales. Why is this and what's being done about it? -- Jackie O'Neill, Hershey, PA

Sadly for our world and its biodiversity, whales are still being killed despite an international ban on commercial whaling. Indeed, rampant whaling over the last two centuries has decimated just about every whale population around the globe. According to Greenpeace, many whale species are down to around one percent of their estimated former abundance before the days of commercial whaling.

Fourteen whaling nations came together in 1946 to form the International Whaling Commission (IWC) to manage whale stocks and recommend hunting limits where appropriate. But the continuing decline of populations forced the IWC to call for an outright ban on all commercial whaling in 1986. But Japan, Norway and Iceland continue to defy the ban, each harvesting hundreds if not more whales every year.

"The Japanese invented the concept of 'scientific' whaling in 1987 as a way around the moratorium on commercial whaling," reports Greenpeace. "Their research is not really research. It is an excuse for supplying whale meat on the Japanese market." The research consists, among other things, of analysis of the contents of the digestive tract. The data on what the animals eat is then used to argue that whales eat too much commercially important fish and that the populations should be culled to save the fish, argues Greenpeace, and that the Japanese selectively release data on certain species and ignore data on others.

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Norway resumed whaling in 1993 "as an attempt by the political party in power at the time to gain popularity in northern Norway," says Greenpeace. "In order to justify its hunt, Norwegian scientists calculated a population estimate, which was later found to be much higher than the data supported."

And Iceland increased its whaling dramatically in recent years. "In 2010 alone, Icelandic whalers killed hundreds of whales—including endangered fin whales—and shipped more than 750 tons of whale meat and products to Japan, whose market is already glutted with whale meat from its own 'scientific research whaling' program," reports the non-profit Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC).

Several green groups including NRDC recently petitioned the Obama administration to take action against Iceland under the Pelly Amendment to the Fisherman's Protective Act. "The Amendment allows the President to impose trade sanctions against a country that is 'diminishing the effectiveness' of a conservation agreement—in Iceland's case the whaling moratorium and another international treaty that prohibits trade in endangered species," says NRDC. The petition names several Iceland firms—including major seafood companies with ties to Iceland's whaling industry—as potential targets for trade sanctions.

Greenpeace has been pressuring Japan to not only end its own whaling but also its support of whaling by other nations not abiding by the IWC moratorium. "We are working around the world to increase the pressure put on Japan by conservation-minded governments at the IWC to close the political loopholes that allow the reckless hunt to continue," says Greenpeace, "and to highlight the vote-buying that keep these loopholes in existence."

CONTACTS: IWC, [www.iwcoffice.org](http://www.iwcoffice.org); Greenpeace, [www.greenpeace.org](http://www.greenpeace.org); NRDC, [www.nrdc.org](http://www.nrdc.org).

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