

Majority of Japanese Public Does Not Support Whaling or Consume Whale Meat

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Wide-held theory that Japanese support whaling and defend whale meat industry is disproved by leading international opinion research firm.

In a survey of the Japanese public released today by the International fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and Greenpeace, 55% held no opinion or were neutral in regard to commercial whaling - dispelling the wide-held belief that the Japanese public was a strong proponent of commercial whaling. While 14% opposed whaling outright, only 11% of those polled supported whaling. A strong 20% noted that the reason for killing the whales would play a part in their decision. The survey was conducted by Britain's leading opinion research company MORI, in partnership with the well-known Nippon Research Center in Japan.

The Japanese government has been the strongest global proponents for the reopening of international commercial whaling - banned since 1986. The Japanese most often cite cultural and traditional values as the main reason for hunting whale. However, in their report, MORI say *"the Japanese are largely neutral on the perceived importance to them personally of commercial whaling continuing: 24% say it is important, 25% say not - and half are undecided."*

Even more dramatically, the report finds that, *"Virtually nobody fears Japan's cultural identity would suffer greatly were whaling to stop". "Even among whaling's defenders, only one in twenty predict a 'great deal' of damage if it stopped, and four in ten (42%) say 'not very much' or 'not at all'."*

"These strong poll results clearly indicate that the people of Japan no longer consider whaling to be an integral part of their cultural heritage, nor do they support it," said Karen Steuer, IFAW Director of Commercial Trade and Exploitation of Animals. *"Finally we can do away with this archaic argument,"* she added.

These significant Japanese poll results come at a time when Japan has heated up its battle to reopen the international trade-unions in whale meat. Japan will introduce three such proposals - including the hunting of minke and gray whale - at the upcoming Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) meeting to be held in Nairobi from April 10th - 20th. Yesterday, a top Japanese fishery official announced that Japan would utilise software developed by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) to carry to its hunts without endangering the species.

"The government's claim that the IWC has developed a computer program that will suddenly allow them to go whaling is not valid," said IFAW's Japan Representative, Naoko Funahashi. *"Several years ago the IWC approved a method of calculating how many whales might be taken from some whale stocks without endangering them, but that method is designed only to be used in combination with a strict monitoring regime to prevent the under-reporting of whale catches that has plagued the whaling industry throughout history. This monitoring procedure has yet to be developed and approved by the IWC."*

The MORI poll report also shows that Japanese do not consider whale meat to be an important part of their cultural diet, starting that, *"Six in ten (61%) have not eaten it since childhood, if at all, and just 1% eat it once among (and nobody more often than this)."* *"Clearly the people of Japan do not consider whale meat to be a significant component of their diet",* said Steuer. *"Japanese whaling proponents can no longer be allowed to use this as their defence in campaigning for international commercial whaling."*

Technical details

A nationally representative sample of 1,185 Japanese adults aged 18+ was interviewed face-to-face between 17 November - 2 December 1999.

Nippon Research Center is one of Japan's leading opinion research agencies, and a frequent collaborator with MORI on Japanese research.