Scientists urged to make clear statement on Japan's Antarctic whaling plans

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As the scientific committee of the conservation body for whales, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) begins its meeting in San Diego this week (May 19-June 3), it is being urged to follow the lead of an expert review panel and strongly reject Japan's plans to resume Antarctic whaling.

The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), wants the scientists to make a clear recommendation whether Japan's plans for a continuation of so-called 'scientific whaling' in the Southern Ocean should go ahead.

Last year the International Court of Justice ruled that Japan's Antarctic whaling programme (called JARPA-II) did not meet the criteria for science and was therefore illegal. Despite initially vowing to abide by the decision of the World Court, Japan quickly announced plans for further whaling as part of a programme with a different name (NEWREP-A), to begin in the Southern Ocean after a pause of just one year.

IFAW was pleased that an independent expert review panel of the IWC, which met in Tokyo in February and published its findings last month, came to the clear conclusion that Japan's proposal did not demonstrate the need for whales to be killed to achieve its objectives.

Previous IWC Scientific Committee meetings have never come up with such a straightforward conclusion regarding scientific whaling, partly because the proponents participate in the decision-making process. However, the expert panel appointed by the IWC, which does not include the proponents, was designed to avoid such conflicts. In light of this and other recent strong statements against Japan's Antarctic whaling, it is hoped that this year the Committee may speak out.

Patrick Ramage, IFAW's Global Whale Programme Director, said: "The World Court and leading scientists have already found that Japan's Antarctic whaling is not for the purposes of science and stated that there is no need to slaughter more whales. We urge Japan to pursue only non-lethal whale research.

"This season whales in the Southern Ocean were safe from commercial slaughter for the first time in more than a century, and we want it to stay this way."

Ramage added: "Various 'scientific whaling' programmes have been reviewed by the Scientific Committee over the years as though they are genuine scientific projects. It is vital that this time, the Scientific Committee is clear in its rejection of further Antarctic whaling in the 2015/16 season."

The next full plenary meeting of the IWC will take place in September 2016.

Since the global moratorium on commercial whaling was introduced, Japan has killed more than 14,000 whales in the name of science, the vast majority of these in the Southern Ocean.

IFAW opposes all commercial whaling as inherently cruel and works in whaling countries to promote whale watching as a humane and sustainable alternative that is better for whales and for coastal communities.

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For more information or to arrange interviews please contact Clare Sterling at IFAW on +44 (0)20 7587 6708, mobile +44 (0)7917 507717 or email csterling@ifaw.org

About IFAW (International Fund for Animal Welfare)

Founded in 1969, IFAW saves animals in crisis around the world. With projects in more than 40 countries, IFAW rescues individual animals, works to prevent cruelty to animals and advocates for the protection of wildlife and habitats.www.ifaw.org.

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