

Katrín Jakobsdóttir  
The Prime Minister of Iceland  
Stjornarradshusid vid Laekjartorg  
101 Reykjavik  
Iceland

February 2024

Dear Prime Minister,

**Re: Renewing Whaling Licences**

We understand that you and your government are under a heavy work load due to the recent volcanic eruptions, and we wish to extend our sincere condolences to the community of Grindavík in this challenging time. We are also sensitive to the challenges faced by Minister Svavarsdóttir, and our thoughts are with her during her period away from office.

As representatives of environmental and animal welfare organisations, we were heartened to learn of the temporary suspension of whaling in the summer of 2023. We were dismayed, however, at the subsequent lifting of the suspension, which resulted in the killing of 24 fin whales; this figure includes 23 whales that were landed, and one whale that was struck multiple times by harpoons, but lost. We are further concerned by the death of a near to full-term unborn calf in 2023. Such a death is not a unique occurrence, given that in both 2018 and 2022, eleven pregnant female fin whales were killed during the course of the whaling season.

The Icelandic Food and Veterinary Authority (MAST) temporarily suspended the operations of whaling vessel Hvalur 8 in September, citing further breaches of animal welfare protocols during the capture of a fin whale. This supports our view that despite efforts to “improve” whale killing methods, it is impossible to reliably kill whales humanely at sea.

Currently, due to Hvalur hf.’s licence expiring in December 2023, no company in Iceland has permission to hunt whales. We acknowledge, however, that an application has recently been submitted by Hvalur hf. for a licence renewal, potentially allowing Icelandic whaling to continue beyond 2030. We maintain that Iceland’s commitment to the Convention of Biological Diversity’s Global Biodiversity Framework, specifically Target 4, is potentially incompatible with continued whaling, given that fin whales remain listed on IUCN’s Red List as Vulnerable (meaning that the species is “considered to be facing a high risk of extinction in the wild”).

We concur with the Ombudsman’s finding that the 1949 Whaling Act has not been amended in line with the IWC’s increased emphasis on animal welfare. Referencing the conclusions of a 2023 report by the Icelandic Food and Veterinary Authority that whaling violated the Icelandic Animal Welfare Act (Lög um velferð dýra (2013 nr. 55, 8 apríl)), we respectfully conclude that no updates to the Act or associated Regulations would provide assurance or public confidence that whales would be killed “swiftly and painlessly” in practice (as required under Art. 2 of the Lögum velferðdýra). Our organisations believe that a permanent cessation of whaling is the only way to truly align with Iceland’s commitment to environmental stewardship, animal welfare, and sustainable economic practices.

We appreciate your leadership during this challenging time for your country and look forward to the Working Group’s report on the legal framework for whaling.

Yours sincerely,  
Lucy Babey

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Chair

**Marine Mammal Working Group - Wildlife and Countryside Link**

This letter has been supported by the following organisations.



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Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) is the largest nature coalition in England, bringing together 82 organisations to use their joint voice for the protection of the natural world.

For questions or further information please contact: Cassie Rist, Senior Policy and Advocacy Advisor, Wildlife and Countryside Link E: [cassie@wcl.org.uk](mailto:cassie@wcl.org.uk), Wildlife & Countryside Link, Vox Studios, 1 – 45 Durham Street, Vauxhall, London, SE11 5JH [www.wcl.org.uk](http://www.wcl.org.uk)

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