

Deputy Prime Minister of the United Kingdom
Cabinet Office
5 Downing Street
SW12AS

June 2024

Dear Oliver Dowden,

Re: Japanese whaling and the decision taken this week to hunt fin whales

We understand that the Emperor and Empress of Japan will be hosted in a State Visit to the United Kingdom as guests of His Majesty the King by from Tuesday 25th to Thursday 27th June.¹ We are writing, as England's largest coalition of organisations working to protect marine mammals to request that serious concern is raised about Japanese whaling during the visit.

This month, the Japanese Fisheries Agency approved a proposal to expand Japan's current whaling to include IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) listed vulnerable fin whales in its territorial waters and Economic Zone (EEZ) in the North Pacific.

Japan last hunted fin whales in the North Pacific in 1975.² After decades of over-exploitation, including by Japan, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) listed North Pacific fin whales as a Protection Stock (PS) in 1976, thereby prohibiting commercial whaling on this population.³ The IWC subsequently adopted a total ban on all whaling for commercial purposes in 1982, which became effective in 1986.

The North Pacific fin whale remains protected today by both designations. Japan's recent decision to commence hunting of fin whales in the North Pacific violates its international duty to cooperate for a number of reasons and should be strongly protested. There are no agreed abundance estimates for North Pacific fin whale populations. Japan has not used the IWC agreed version of the Revised Management Procedure (RMP) to set whale catch limits and Japan has a duty to participate in good faith in meetings of the IWC and its Scientific Committee. Yet Japanese delegates to the 2024 Scientific Committee did not present information on the proposed hunt and the announcement was made after the meeting ended. Japan appears not to have prepared a transboundary Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or consulted other range states of the North Pacific fin whale. Further, this expansion of Japanese whaling comes despite there being no market for the whale meat.

We also have profound concerns about the welfare implications of this proposed hunt. Japanese whalers have not killed fin whales since 2011 when they hunted the species in Japan's special permit whaling operation in Antarctica.⁴ Current harpoon operators may have no experience in killing a species that is significantly bigger (longer and heavier) than the largest species they currently hunt.⁵

¹ <https://www.royal.uk/news-and-activity/2024-06-04/more-details-on-the-upcoming-state-visit-by-the-emperor-and-empress-of#:~:text=Their%20Majesties%20The%20Emperor%20and,State%20Visit%20at%20Buckingham%20Palace>

² IWC (1978). 28th Report of the International Whaling Commission.

³ IWC (1977). 27th Report of the International Whaling Commission

⁴ IWC, https://iwc.int/table_permit (undated)

⁵ Fin whales can measure up to 25m and weigh up to 70 metric tons. Sei whales can measure up to 19.5m and weigh up to 30 metric tons

Japan provides no information about intended killing methods, including whether the size and charge of the explosive harpoon to be used will account for the morphology and physiology of fin whales. The proposal also ignores the growing body of scientific evidence documenting the important ecosystem functions provided by fin whales and other cetaceans, including carbon sequestration and nutrient cycling.⁶

As the Cabinet Office prepares to support the Royal Household during the visit, we would be grateful if the above request for concerns to be raised to be considered. Thank you in advance.

Yours sincerely,

Lucy Babey, Chair of the Marine Mammals Working Group



⁶ Pearson, H.C., Savoca, M.S., Costa, D.P., Lomas, M.W., Molina, R., Pershing, A.J., Smith, C.R., Villaseñor-Derbez, J.C., Wing, S.R. and Roman, J., 2023. Whales in the carbon cycle: can recovery remove carbon dioxide?. *Trends in Ecology & Evolution*, 38(3), pp.238-249. And Gilbert, L., Jeanniard-du-Dot, T., Authier, M., Chouvelon, T. and Spitz, J., 2023. Composition of cetacean communities worldwide shapes their contribution to ocean nutrient cycling. *Nature Communications*, 14(1), p.5823.