

Should whaling be completely banned?

Some people think it's an important cultural tradition; others say hunting these animals is cruel.

What you need to know

- Many types of whales have traditionally been hunted for their meat, fat and baleen (also known as whalebone), which is a material found in the mouths of some whales.
- Whales are the largest living animals in the world. They are mammals, not fish, and are highly intelligent. Most whales live in social groups called pods.
- In 1986 the International Whaling Commission banned commercial whaling (hunting whales to make money). However, countries are still allowed to hunt whales for scientific research.



A Japanese ship chases whales in the Southern Ocean.

WOW!
Whales can live for a really long time. Some bowhead whales are thought to be more than 200 years old.

In coastal areas around parts of the Pacific, Atlantic and Arctic oceans, whales have been a valuable source of food and other useful substances for thousands of years. Whaling increased significantly in the Middle Ages (from around the 5th to the 15th century) when Europeans started to use oil made from whale fat to power lamps. Over the years the whale population fell dramatically as demand increased and whaling methods became more efficient. However, in the last century the whales' decline has slowed down for two reasons – petrol and other fuels have replaced whale oil, and the International Whaling Commission has banned commercial whaling. Despite the ban, though, some countries continue to hunt whales. In March this year, a Japanese fleet killed 333 whales in the Antarctic Ocean, arguing it was carrying out necessary research. Should countries be allowed to continue whaling, or is it time to put a complete stop to it?

Yes – hunting whales is cruel

For a start, it's already illegal to hunt whales for profit. Despite this, around 1,400 whales are killed every year by whalers from countries including Japan, Iceland and Norway. Some countries claim it's for scientific research, but activists say this is just an excuse. Surely these scientists could find out just as much about whales by studying them alive. Whale meat isn't an essential part of the human diet either; in Iceland it's mainly served to curious tourists, and in Japan some of it is thought to end up in pet food. Perhaps the worst thing about whaling is how cruel it is. It's not easy to kill an animal as large as a whale – it can be a slow and painful process. Whales also take a long time to reproduce. In fact, the global whale population has not recovered from the intensive whaling of the last few centuries. Whales are sensitive and intelligent mammals, and they deserve to be respected.

No – it's no worse than killing other animals

For a small but significant number of communities around the world, whaling is an important part of their way of life. Whaling traditions go back thousands of years and should be respected. For these people, whaling is in their culture and it's how they earn money. Besides, these countries aren't breaking the rules if they hunt the whales for scientific research. Thanks to the International Whaling Commission, most species of whales are not in danger of actual extinction any time soon. In fact, there are some species of whales that eat large amounts of fish and numbers need to be kept under control to protect the local fish population. People can be squeamish about eating whales, but if these people eat beef, chicken, lamb or pork, what's the difference? In fact, whale meat is actually much healthier than some other meats – it is lower in fat and higher in protein than most cuts of pork and beef.

ALAMY

YES 3 reasons why whaling should be completely banned

- 1 It's cruel – whales are intelligent creatures and there's no painless way to kill them.
- 2 Commercial whaling has already been banned and those who say they're hunting whales for "research" are just trying to bend the rules.
- 3 It's unnecessary – there's little demand for whale meat and few people would miss it if it were no longer on the menu.

NO 3 reasons why whaling shouldn't be completely banned

- 1 For a number of people around the world, whaling is part of their culture.
- 2 Whales should be treated like any other animal we kill for food. It's ridiculous to say that some animals are more important than others.
- 3 Whaling is closely monitored – the International Whaling Commission was set up to protect whales and ensure they don't become extinct.

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