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IUCN welcomes judgement on whaling by the International Court of Justice, March 31 2014

IUCN welcomes the ruling by the International Court of Justice issued in The Hague on 31 March 2014. The extent to which the “scientific purposes” clause in the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW) may be used as a loophole to catch whales in large numbers has been a long-running source of controversy in the International Whaling Commission and other fora. In IUCN’s view, the Court’s ruling brings much needed clarity to the question. The Court has ruled that it is not sufficient merely to declare catches to be for scientific purposes, but that the actual number and species of whales taken must be justified on scientific grounds. IUCN expects that all nations engaged in whaling on scientific grounds will abide by the ruling, and that any further catches for scientific purposes in the Antarctic and elsewhere will be strictly in accordance with the criteria specified by the Court. IUCN further notes that the Court stipulated that if whaling does not meet these requirements for “scientific purposes”, then it must satisfy the regulations for commercial whaling contained in the ICRW Schedule (unless it is aboriginal subsistence whaling). IUCN has for many years maintained the position that if any whaling takes place, it should be legal and sustainable, regardless of the purpose of the use, be it commercial, indigenous, subsistence or scientific. IUCN also draws attention to [Recommendation 4.115](#) from the 4th IUCN World Conservation Congress in 2008 which among other things highlights the socioeconomic importance of non-lethal utilization of whales.

- IUCN notes that the catches of whales which were under dispute in this case were taken within the Southern Ocean Sanctuary, which was adopted in 1994 with the support of IUCN (further reiterated in 2008 in [Recommendation 4.118](#)), and which is due for its 2nd 10-year review this year. IUCN further notes that the threats facing whales and other marine life in the 21st century are much broader than was envisaged when the ICRW was agreed back in 1946. IUCN welcomes the huge advances in non-lethal techniques and technologies for studying whales and other marine species that have been achieved in recent years, and the efforts of the 10-nation Southern Ocean Research Partnership to co-ordinate and advance non-lethal research on whales and their environment in the Southern Ocean. IUCN strongly encourages former whaling nations to continue their whale research on a non-lethal basis and to participate in these efforts.

The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species contains assessments of the status of whale species and populations worldwide, and during 2014 the Cetacean Specialist Group of the IUCN Species Survival Commission will be reviewing and updating the status of many cetacean species. IUCN maintains specific [Guidelines](#) intended to promote responsible collecting of threatened species by researchers.

Links:

International Court of Justice ruling: <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/files/148/18160.pdf>

Southern Ocean Research Partnership: <http://iwc.int/sorp>

IUCN SSC Cetacean Specialist Group <http://www.iucn-csg.org/>

IUCN Red List of Threatened Species <http://www.iucnredlist.org/>

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