

Japan and Allies Pass a Motion That Criticizes a Whaling Ban

Principio del formulario

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FRIGATE BAY, St. Kitts and Nevis, June 18 (Reuters) — For the first time in more than two decades, Japan and other whaling nations on Sunday won support for a motion criticizing a global whaling ban, signaling that they might finally have the muscle to challenge the moratorium.

The approval of a nonbinding prowhaling declaration by the International Whaling Commission does not immediately threaten a 1986 moratorium on commercial whaling, which saved whales from extinction and which Japan would like to overturn.

But in backing a statement that said that the whaling ban was no longer valid, that whales were responsible for depleting fish stocks and that environmental and some other advocacy organizations were a "threat," the Whaling Commission strengthened Japan's hopes of chipping away at the ban. The vote was 33 to 32. There was one abstention.

"This is a huge disaster," said Kitty Block of Humane Society International shortly after the vote at the annual meeting of the commission in this Caribbean island state. "This is now going to be their propaganda."

Japan has abided by the moratorium on commercial whaling since it came into force two decades ago, but, along with Iceland, uses a legal loophole to conduct what it describes as whaling for scientific purposes. Norway is the only country that ignores the ban.

More than 25,000 whales have been hunted and killed since the moratorium went into effect.

Even so, Japan and its allies have sought to return the Whaling Commission to its 1946 roots as an organization that regulates whaling, and they have encouraged new prowhaling nations to join the commission in the hope of wresting control from protectionists. They would need 75 percent of the votes in the commission to end the moratorium.

"For the first time in more than two decades the Whaling Commission expresses support for commercial whaling," said Rune Frovik, secretary of the Norwegian pro-whaling lobby the High North Alliance.

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