



B9 Protected Species Report

February 2019 Council Meeting

Action Memo

Staff: Steve MacLean

Action Required: 1. Protected Species Report – review

Japan to resume commercial whaling in north Pacific

On Wednesday, December 26, Japan announced that it is withdrawing from the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and will resume commercial whale hunting in the north Pacific in 2019. The IWC was established in 1946 to preserve whale stocks and allow for “orderly development” of the whaling industry. As whale stocks continued to collapse in the 20th century, the IWC agreed to a moratorium on commercial whaling in 1986. Japan, Iceland, and Norway objected to the moratorium, which allowed them to continue to hunt whales in their territorial waters. Japan also conducted annual Antarctic whale hunts in the name of scientific research, which it says is necessary to evaluate global populations of whale species. In 2014, the International Court of Justice ruled that Japan’s Antarctic whale hunt had no scientific basis, supporting conservation organizations that claim the research whaling was an attempt to maintain the commercial whaling industry.

Japan requested permission from the IWC to hunt Antarctic minke whales, common minke whales, Bryde’s whales, and sei whales in 2019. The proposal was rejected by the IWC at the commission’s annual meeting. This prompted Japan’s exit from the IWC, and their decision to resume coastal whaling in its own waters.

Whale meat was an important source of protein in Japan as it recovered from World War II, but consumption has declined significantly since then. A Japanese representative stated that “...whaling has been supporting local communities, and thereby developed the life and culture of using whales. Japan hopes that more countries will share the same position to promote sustainable use of aquatic living resources based on scientific evidence”.