

Protecting Whales



Photo: Flip Nicklin/Minden Pictures

Despite an international moratorium on commercial whaling, roughly 2,000 whales are killed each year, including endangered and vulnerable species.

PROVIDING A SAFE HOME FOR WHALES IN THE WORLD'S OCEANS

Whales are the largest and most charismatic of all marine species. Relentless hunting in the 19th and 20th centuries devastated populations of many whale species, driving a number of them to the brink of extinction, and recovery for many remains uncertain. After several failed attempts to bring whaling under control, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) in 1982 finally adopted a worldwide moratorium on commercial whaling that has been in force since 1986.

Unfortunately, the moratorium did not end the killing of whales. The IWC's rules, like those of many international bodies, apply only to member states that agree to abide by them. Today, Japan, Iceland and Norway continue to hunt whales through loopholes in the IWC's rules, including one that allows for "scientific" whaling—whaling for scientific purposes where the meat from animals killed can be sold to pay for the research. More than 30,000 whales have been killed since the moratorium began,

including endangered and vulnerable species such as fin and sei whales.

In 1994, the IWC declared a whale sanctuary in the waters around Antarctica, the summer feeding grounds of 80 to 90 percent of the world's remaining whales. Since then, however, Japan has not only continued scientific whaling in the sanctuary, it has also increased the numbers of whales killed and species targeted. Exploiting the scientific whaling loophole, coupled with a political impasse within the Commission, has undermined the IWC's authority and effectiveness. IWC members have agreed that fundamental reforms are urgently needed to address whaling and a host of other threats to whales, such as climate change, pollution and ship strikes. They have not, however, agreed on how to do this. To halt the unfettered killing of whales in the world's oceans, and to ensure the enforceability of international measures aimed at protecting them, the Pew Environment Group launched a

major initiative in 2007 designed to accomplish the following:

- Reverse the momentum that pro-whaling nations gained in weakening the international moratorium on commercial whaling.
- Develop the voices of civil society by creating a network of nongovernmental organizations supporting whale conservation in the Pacific, West Africa and the Caribbean.
- Ensure a voting majority of countries in the IWC that oppose commercial and scientific whaling.
- End Japanese scientific whaling in the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary.
- Achieve lasting reform of the IWC so that it will provide greater protection for whales.

It is time to resolve the global conflict over whales to ensure healthy oceans in the future for these magnificent creatures.