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Japan to Resume Commercial Whaling

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Recently Japan announced its **withdrawal from the International Whaling Commission (IWC)** conservation body and it will **resume commercial whale hunting** in its territorial waters and exclusive economic zones from July 2019.

- The **IWC, established in 1946 to conserve and manage the world's whale** and cetacean population, introduced a **prohibition on commercial whaling in 1986** after some species were almost driven to extinction.
- Earlier Japan tried to convince the IWC to allow it to resume commercial whaling as certain species were sufficient to support renewed hunting but it failed with strong opposition from anti-whaling nations led by Australia, the European Union and the United States.
- After withdrawal **Japan joins Iceland and Norway** in openly **defying the IWC's ban** on commercial whale hunting.
- Leaving the IWC means Japanese whalers will be able to resume hunting of minke and other whales in Japanese coastal waters currently protected by the IWC.
- Japan will **not be able** to continue the so-called **scientific research hunts in the Antarctic** that has been exceptionally allowed as an IWC member under the **Antarctic Treaty**.
- According to Japan IWC has failed to live up to its initial dual mandate in 1946 to find a balance between preserving whale stocks and allowing the orderly development of the whaling industry.

Whaling in Japan

- Japan has **hunted whales** for centuries, and the meat was a **key source of protein** in the immediate post-World War II years.
- According to Japan whaling is an important part of Japan's traditions and the withdrawal would allow fishermen to pass on country's rich whaling culture onto the next generation.

- Engagement in whaling has been supporting local communities, and thereby developed the life and culture of using whales.
- **Influential lawmakers** in Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Liberal Democratic Party whose constituencies include **whaling communities have long lobbied for a resumption** of commercial whaling.
- Whale is hunted for oil which is used for various purposes like producing candle wax, margarine and other products, like additives in motor oils, automatic transmission fluids, cosmetics, perfumes, detergents and vitamins.

Criticism of Japan's decision

- By leaving the IWC, Japan is **rejecting multilateralism** and setting a bad precedent for conservation, which will likely have serious negative consequences for the world's whales.
- According to **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)** Japan has long **exploited a loophole allowing whales to be killed for "scientific research"** and selling it commercially.
- According to Conservationists it will **further aggravate the situation** as **marine ecosystem** is already **facing existential threats** from climate change and marine pollution, including plastics, chemicals and noise.

International Whaling Commission (IWC)

- IWC is an **Inter-governmental Organisation** whose purpose is the conservation of whales and the management of whaling.
- The legal framework of the IWC is the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling which was established in 1946.
- The commission is the pre-eminent global body responsible for the conservation and management of whales and leads international efforts to tackle the growing range of threats to whales globally, including by-catch, ship strikes, entanglement, noise, and whaling.
- **India** is a member of IWC.

Antarctic Treaty

- The treaty was opened for signature on December 1, 1959, and officially entered into force on June 23, 1961.
- The original signatories were 12 countries: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Chile, France, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States.
- **India** is also a party to the Antarctic Treaty.

- Some important provisions of the Treaty:
 - Antarctica shall be used for **peaceful purposes** only.
 - **Freedom of scientific investigation** in Antarctica and cooperation toward that end shall continue.
 - Scientific observations and results from Antarctica shall be exchanged and made freely available.
- India is expanding its infrastructure development in Antarctica. The government is rebuilding its station, **Maitri**, to make it bigger and last for at least 30 years.