

Ban on commercial whaling to be overturned

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COMMERCIAL whaling is set to return after almost 25 years as Japan moves to overturn a worldwide ban.

Conservationists say that lifting the current moratorium will threaten the long-term survival of whale populations and would be a highly symbolic defeat for preservation.

They warn it could “open the floodgates” to far bigger slaughter in the future.

At present whaling is carried out mainly by Japan, Iceland and Norway.

The three nations have killed 35,000 whales since the ban was introduced in 1986. In Japan’s case, the killings have been justified as being for “scientific research.”

Under the deal being considered by the International Whaling Commission (IWC), hunting would be legally recognised and there are fears that other countries could take part.

Britain’s opposition to whaling may count for nothing because Denmark is likely to back the change. This failure to reach a European Union consensus will rule out any veto by the remaining 24 member states.

Proposals will be published this week and a deal will be struck at an IWC meeting in Morocco in June. They are expected to be backed by America and Denmark. The US is worried that if it blocks the plan, Japan will veto any renewal of permission for small-scale whale catching by indigenous peoples in Alaska. Denmark is expected to back it to ensure a quota for its dependent territories of Greenland and the Faroes.

Britain is a strong supporter of the existing ban, but may now be unable to stop the new deal being ratified because it votes in a block with the EU.

“The UK’s view, which is anti-whaling, will ultimately not be taken into account,” said Sue Fisher, a policy director at the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society.

The deal would suspend the moratorium on commercial whaling for 10 years and allow Japan, Norway and Iceland to continue whaling within new quotas. Hunters will be permitted to kill whale species that are considered plentiful, including the sperm, sei, fin, Bryde’s and minke — described by a senior Japanese whaling official in 2001 as the “cockroach of the ocean”.

Members of the IWC believe that allowing commercial whaling in a controlled manner will lead to fewer whales being killed.

Japan has been accused of using its foreign aid budget to co-opt 24 small or landlocked nations on the IWC including Mongolia, Nauru, Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada and St Lucia to bolster its pro-whaling vote.

The Japanese embassy yesterday dismissed such claims as “unsubstantiated propaganda”.

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