

partnering to end Icelandic whaling



Tourists on whale watching boats in the port of Haunages, in Eyjafjörður fjord. © IFAW / Siggeir Hafsteinsson

With a complex history, Iceland banned whaling in 1990 following the International Whaling Commission's (IWC) moratorium on commercial whaling.

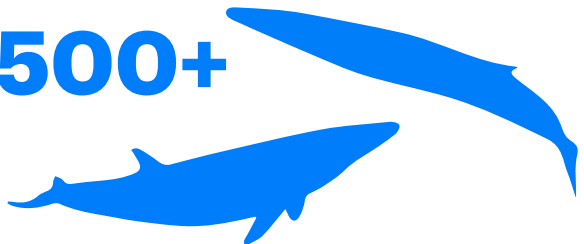
After a 13-year hiatus, Iceland's ban was overturned and the country resumed scientific whaling, and eventually commercial whaling in 2006. Only one member of parliament was opposed to whale hunting and 70 percent of the country supported it. Since 2003, over 1,500 minke and fin whales have been slaughtered.

Demand was driven by misinformed tourists who were encouraged to sample whale meat during their visit to Iceland, under the belief that it was a traditional Icelandic dish.



First fin whales killed in Iceland in 2009. © IFAW

1,500+



over 1,500 minke and fin whales have been **killed** in Iceland's commercial hunt since 2003.

Pro-whaling interests in Iceland also alleged that whaling would create jobs, increase fish supply and benefit the national economy.

IFAW has been committed to the welfare of whales in Icelandic waters since 1990 when we funded the first feasibility study into the potential for commercial whale watching in Iceland.

We oppose commercial whaling. It is inherently cruel and **there is no humane way to kill a whale.** Instead, we promote responsible whale watching as a profitable and sustainable alternative.



Humpback whale diving off Akureyri. © IFAW / Siggeir Hafsteinsson

our approach

Knowing our message might not reach the whalers themselves, we instead turned **our focus toward positive marine conservation and promoted activities that would protect and celebrate whales.** We worked with Icelandic whale watching companies and other stakeholders to launch an extensive advocacy campaign, engaging with politicians and officials at all levels of government, from Iceland's Parliament to the Reykjavik city council, with conservation groups, scientists and Icelandic celebrities. We visited 200 different schools, discussing alternatives to commercial whaling with the next generation.

Almost half of Icelandic Members of Parliament are now sceptical about whaling and support whale watching instead. With the pressure of the tourism industry, **the government has increased Reykjavik's whale watching area by 50%**, effectively reducing the minke whaling area by more than 80%.

368,000

people went whale watching in 2017, more than Iceland's entire population. That's a tenfold increase since 1998.

84%

of Icelanders never eat whale meat.

+100%

the number of Icelanders who oppose fin whaling has doubled between 2013 and 2017.

less than 10%

of Reykjavik's restaurants now serve whale meat.

71%

less tourists sampled whale meat in Iceland between 2009 and 2017.

'Meet Us Don't Eat Us'

In partnership with the Icelandic whale watching coalition, IceWhale, and international diplomats and embassies in Reykjavik, IFAW developed 'Meet Us Don't Eat Us', an awareness campaign to encourage visitors to choose whale watching over whale meat. Over time, **these efforts have significantly reduced the touristic demand for whale meat**, which was crucial since most of the meat was eaten by foreigners and not Icelanders. We also encouraged restaurants in downtown Reykjavik to publicly pledge to be 'Whale Friendly'.

the expected end of Icelandic whaling

Positive partnerships are perhaps IFAW's most powerful tool in encouraging change. In Iceland, **our consistently collaborative, Icelander-led campaign has delivered positive results for whales, Icelanders and the place they call home.** In 2020, not a single whale has been killed by commercial whalers in Icelandic waters. Minke whaling has officially ended, and recent indications are that fin whaling has likely also breathed its last breath.



A minke whale with its head above the water. © IFAW / Jonathan Gordon

▶ **see how at ifaw.org**