

Greenpeace condemns Iceland's new whaling quota as a "shameless stunt"

If the new interim Icelandic government allows the new whaling quota introduced by the outgoing Fisheries Minister to stand, it will mean dire consequences for legitimate trade and tourism that is needed to help Iceland's economy. Whaling tarnishes the image of Iceland internationally, and is worthless from an economic point of view.

Over 90% of the meat to be produced by the increased quota would come from endangered fin whales, which are not eaten by Icelanders, only exported. But the export market to Japan is weak; a 60-tonne trial shipment of fin whale meat, which languished in customs for four months before being given import permission, remains only partly sold, and Japan already has thousands of tonnes of unsold whale meat in frozen storage.

Iceland's government should look to tourism, and in particular whale watching, as a means to rebuilding the economy.

Even a small increase in tourists going to Iceland to watch whales will create and secure more jobs and more money than whaling ever will. In 2008, about 115,000 people went whale watching in Iceland. Over 20% of them stated that whale watching was as an important reason for visiting Iceland, and they spent millions of US dollars in revenue in the process. A further 115,000 people have signed a pledge that they will consider visiting Iceland if the country ceases whaling - which could generate US\$ 117million in tourism revenue, compared with only US\$ 4million generated at the peak of Iceland's whaling activities.

"The outgoing Icelandic government's whaling quota increase is a shameless stunt that has nothing to do with use of natural resources, and everything to do with politics," said Greenpeace International Whales Campaign coordinator Sara Holden.

"Greenpeace joins the Icelandic tourism industry in urging that the new interim government reverses the quota increase and instead focuses on real solutions that promote the beauty of Iceland's environment - such as tourism and whale watching."

Greenpeace is an independent, global campaigning organisation that acts to change attitudes and behaviour, to protect and conserve the environment, and to promote peace.