



Tokyo's hopes of a "green" Olympic Games can't be realised while Japan continues killing whales

Dear Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, Ambassador Hajime Hayashi, Minister Tamayo Marukawa

The Japanese Government is to be commended for aiming to make the upcoming Tokyo 2021 Olympic and Paralympic Games the "[greenest games ever](#)". We are at a pivotal moment in our global efforts to avert catastrophic climate breakdown, and high-profile, international events like the Olympics provide a vital platform to promote environmental protection. However, as Olympic hosts, Japan's commitments on planetary protection need to extend beyond the National Stadium, beyond plastic waste podiums, recycled metal medals and sustainable athletic apparel. As one of the few countries in the world to continue to engage in the cruel and unsustainable practice of commercial whaling, Japan can't win gold for the environment until its commitments extend into the Ocean too.

Killing whales not only causes immense animal suffering, it's also killing some of our planet's most important environmental guardians.

Whales play a key role in capturing and storing harmful carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas that is the main contributor to climate change. One way they do this is when they feed at depth and then defecate nearer the water surface, they provide vital nutrients to the plant plankton, or phytoplankton, which grow in the sunlit upper waters. Globally, phytoplankton absorbs up to 35% of all anthropogenic carbon dioxide produced. Whales also store tons of carbon in their bodies, and so when they die their carcasses sink to the seabed safely locking away 33 tons of CO₂ on average for hundreds of years.

After centuries of damaging commercial whaling, it is only now that we are coming to understand the remarkable roles that whales play in helping to maintain and nurture marine ecosystems, a role that commercial whaling directly disrespects and disrupts. Protecting these majestic creatures isn't just the right thing to do ethically, but is also the wise thing to do ecologically. They have intrinsic ecological value.

Scientists estimate that in the years before industrial whaling began, baleen whale populations sank up to 1.9 million tonnes of carbon per year to the ocean bed. It has been suggested that this is equivalent to removing up to 410,000 cars from our roads each year. By contrast, killing and processing whales releases carbon back into the atmosphere.

For many decades, Japan claimed its whaling to be 'scientific', an abuse of a form of research allowed by the International Whaling Commission (IWC). However, this was just a thin camouflage for a large commercial take inflicted on whale populations in the North Pacific and Antarctica. In 2019, Japan stepped right outside of any attempt to meet the requirements of international law and left the IWC and continued its commercial hunting of hundreds of minke, Bryde's and sei whales in the North Pacific. Japan, Norway and Iceland are the only countries in the world sidestepping the moratorium on killing the great whales for profit in recent years (although we are pleased to note that Iceland has not killed whales for two years now).

Instead of killing whales, all nations of the world should be united in restoring whale populations to their pre-whaling numbers. The science is clear, we must urgently reduce carbon dioxide emissions if we are to avoid the earth's temperature rising further. That requires game-changing commitment. We urge the Japanese government to take this opportunity to consign whale killing to the history books and demonstrate a commitment to cetacean and planetary protection.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Claire Bass". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Claire Bass, executive director, Humane Society International/UK

On behalf of signatories:

- Humane Society International/UK
- Chris Butler-Stroud, CEO, Whale and Dolphin Conservation
- Lucy Babey, head of science and conservation, ORCA
- Brian da Cal, director, FOUR PAWS UK
- Clare Perry, ocean and climate campaign leader, Environmental Investigation Agency
- Susan Millward, marine program director, Animal Welfare Institute
- David Kaplan, Esq., president, Cetacean Society International
- Dominic Dyer, policy advisor, Born Free