

Britain's Fish and Chips linked to Whale Slaughter

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British diners could unwittingly be supporting Iceland's whale hunt as a major UK fish wholesaler continues to source seafood from an Icelandic company linked to the killing of endangered fin whales. Fish sales to the UK and Europe are important in keeping their whaling vessels in business. Consumers are being urged to question the source of the fish at more than 10,000 fish and chip shops across the UK after new research linked it to the controversial Icelandic whale hunt.

Although commercial whaling is banned, countries like Iceland, Norway and Japan are still allowed to hunt whales for 'scientific research'.

Iceland is now accused of breaking international agreements by catching and selling large quantities of whale meat to Japan. Japan's own industry has stalled recently under pressure from activists from the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society and the country's recent earthquake.

Iceland's biggest whaling company Hvalur has killed 273 endangered fin whales and exported more than 1,200 tonnes of fin whale meat and blubber to Japan since 2008, according to the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), in a trade worth estimated US\$17 million.

The EIA says Icelandic businessman Kristján Loftsson and his firm Hvalur are the 'driving force' behind the whale trade. Loftsson organised the opening of a company Misaka Shoji in 2009 to import Icelandic whale meat into the lucrative Japanese market - generating an estimated US\$7 million in profit already, according to the EIA.

Classified by many countries as an endangered species, the fin whale is the second largest animal in the world after the blue whale with around 30,000 believed to be left in the North Atlantic.

UK links to whale slaughter

Investigations by the EIA and the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS) have now linked Iceland's whale hunt to one of the UK's most popular dishes.

Doncaster-based Warners Fish Merchants Ltd supplies scores of UK restaurants, fish and chip shops and hotels with cod and haddock sourced from HB Grandi, one of Iceland's biggest fishing companies.

HB Grandi's facilities have been used to process meat from fin whales hunted by Hvalur.

What's more Hvalur's managing director Kristjan Loftsson is deputy chairman of HB Grandi. Arni Vilhjalmsen, chairman of Hvalur, is also chair of HB Grandi.

When contacted by the Ecologist, HB Grandi, which exports half of all its fish to the UK, said it didn't hunt whales itself but had in the past leased one of its buildings to Hvalur for processing whale meat. It also admitted its biggest shareholder was a company called Vogun, owned by Hvalur.

Campaigners have been calling on Iceland to ban its hunt and trade of whales.

But ahead of the annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission this week, the WDCS say international pressure is unlikely to change Iceland's support for its whale hunt.

It says consumer pressure on the industry could see it eventually collapse. 'Iceland's whalers are struggling to make a profit in order to revive their industry. That makes revenue from fish sales to the UK and Europe important in keeping their whaling vessels in business,' says WDCS whaling campaigner Sue Fisher.

'If we can make people aware of this situation and get them asking questions the next time they pop into their chip shop, UK fish distributors like Warners will think twice about where it sources its fish. British consumers will help make it hard for Hvalur to continue its cruel business.'

No one from Warner's Fish Merchants was available to comment. Kristjan Loftsson failed to respond to the Ecologist.

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