



You wouldn't know it from the headline of this week's NYT article ("[US Leads New Bid to Phase Out Whale Hunting](#),") but the worldwide commercial-whaling moratorium that has been in place since 1986 is under seige. Countries are meeting this week to work out details of a deal in which the world's three leading whaling nations, Iceland, Norway, and Japan, would for the first time win the blessing of the International Whaling Commission, the whaling world's governing body and keeper of the moratorium, to continue to hunt for whales through at least 2020.

A draft version of the deal under consideration, released in March, is available [here](#). Marine conservationists and IWC hounds Mark Simmonds and Sue Fisher have a good op-ed [here](#) that characterizes the deal this way, in contrast to the NYT piece:

At the core of the proposal is a 10-year suspension of the moratorium. This would legitimise Japan, Norway and Iceland's whaling, allowing them to carry on hunting whales commercially without recourse to special permits or objections. Negotiations are now under way to set quotas for the species that will be commercially hunted: humpback, sperm, minke, sei, fin and Bryde's whales.

In exchange for legitimizing this hunting, the US hopes to get reductions in the total number of whales killed over the 2010-2020 timeline, as well as some procedural safeguards to prevent international trading in whale meat. But nothing in the deal, as far as I can see, leads to a complete "phase out" of whaling beyond 2020, as the NYT suggests — or any reductions at all after the 10-year deal expires.

One more dig at the NYT reporting: check out [this refutation](#) by Australia, a stalwart of the anti-whaling countries at IWC, of the paper's report of its support of the deal.