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The International Whaling Commission decides to not lift ban on commercial whaling this year.

Ban on whaling stays in place until next year
By the A.M. Costa Rica wire services

SORRENTO, Italy – The International Whaling Commission has decided it is not yet ready to lift a ban on commercial whaling. At the end of a fractious annual meeting, the commission decided further discussion on whale management is needed, before the 18-year ban can be lifted.

The four-day meeting of the International Whaling Commission held here, was dominated by discussions of a possible lifting of the 1986 moratorium on commercial whaling. Leading a group of countries that would like to see the ban lifted are Japan, Iceland and Norway.

A difficult session was held on the final day of the meeting, which saw the text of a resolution by the 57-member Commission amended several times. One of the main sticking points was whether a vote on a plan to lift the ban on commercial whaling should take place at next year's meeting. Once the commission decided to drop the provision calling for a vote, the resolution was adopted.

Environmentalists claimed victory after the vote, saying further discussions on whale management was the right way to move forward. But Japan and other pro-whaling nations expressed disappointment and said the decision undermines the authority of the whaling commission.

The plan for a limited resumption of commercial whaling, under discussion at the meeting, was drawn up by commission chairman Henrik Fischer of Denmark. It called for a five-year phase-in period, when commercial whaling would be allowed only in coastal waters. It also contained measures to ensure whalers did not exceed quotas.

The United States had backed the proposal, but insisted it had not abandoned its traditional anti-whaling stance.

A number of other Japanese proposals were also rejected, including one to abolish a whale sanctuary in the Antarctic Ocean and another to lift a ban on commercial whaling of minke whales, also in the Antarctic Ocean.

During the meeting, the commission also passed a resolution urging nations to find more humane methods for killing whales. Although it did not ban harpoons, it did say these can cause whales to suffer, and ordered the commission to research different killing methods.

