

Iceland suspends whale hunt until end of August

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REYKJAVIK: Iceland's government said on Tuesday that it was suspending this year's whale hunt until the end of August due to animal welfare concerns, likely bringing the controversial practice to a historic end.

Animal rights groups and environmentalists hailed the decision, with the Humane Society International calling it "a major milestone in compassionate whale conservation".

"I have taken the decision to suspend whaling until Aug 31," Food Minister Svandis Svavars-

dottir said in a statement, after a government-commissioned report concluded the hunt does not comply with Iceland's Animal Welfare Act.

Recent monitoring by Iceland's Food and Veterinary Authority on the fin whale hunt found that the killing of the animals took too long based on the main objectives of the Animal Welfare Act.

Shocking video clips broadcast by the veterinary authority showed a whale's agony as it was hunted for five hours.

"If the government and li-

censes cannot guarantee welfare requirements, these activities do not have a future," the minister said.

The country has only one remaining whaling company, Hvalur, and its licence to hunt fin whales expires this year.

Another company hung up its harpoons for good in 2020, saying the work was no longer profitable.

Iceland's whaling season runs from mid-June to mid-September, and it is doubtful Hvalur would head out to sea that late in

the season.

Annual quotas authorise the killing of 209 fin whales — the second-longest marine mammal after the blue whale — and 217 minke whales, one of the smallest species.

But catches have fallen drastically in recent years due to a dwindling market for whale meat.

Iceland, Norway and Japan are the only countries that have continued whale hunting in the face of fierce criticism from environmentalists and animal rights' defenders. **AFP**