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## Case for whaling harpooned

**BYLINE:** Andrew Darby in New York. Andrew Darby travelled to New York with assistance from the Pew Charitable Trusts.

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JAPAN'S case to begin whaling of humpbacks that migrate along the Australian coast has been undermined by one of the world's leading fisheries scientists.

The claim by Japan that reviving humpbacks are outcompeting Antarctic minke whales for food was dismissed by **Daniel Pauly**, a specialist in global fish stocks.

Humpbacks that begin their annual winter migration along the Australian coast within weeks face Japanese harpoons next summer in Antarctica, where the whalers plan to take 50.

As part of the rationale for the "scientific whaling" program, Japanese whalers say the rapid growth of the humpback population has meant a "shift in dominance" among Antarctic whales. They say the humpbacks have begun to push minke whales into poorer feeding grounds.

Dr Pauly, the director of the University of British Columbia's Fisheries Centre, said no such problem existed. "These whales compete within complex food webs, and not directly with each other," he said.

A symposium on whale conservation at the United Nations heard that Japan blamed whales for declines in fish catches.

The claim has been repeated by poorer Caribbean and African nations that depend on local fisheries and vote with Japan in the International Whaling Commission.

The Japanese Institute of Cetacean Research says prey consumption by whales and dolphins around the world totals more than 249 million tonnes a year.

Dr Pauly said Japanese fisheries negotiators were beginning to argue for the culling of whales to save fisheries, saying they were seeking an "ecosystem balance". But he said there was little real overlap between the food that whales ate and human fisheries.

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