

Antarctic whale sanctuary is proposed

MEXICO CITY (AP) Conservationists say a proposal for a vast Antarctic whale sanctuary has the votes to pass as the International Whaling Commission opens its annual conference in Mexico.

But proponents of a haven of 28.5 million sq. km ringing Antarctica face opposition from whaling nations, led by Japan and Norway, which want to ease the 1982 global ban on commercial whaling.

"If the commission creates an Antarctic sanctuary, it will be one of the most important steps they've taken since the 1982 moratorium," said Dana West of the U.S.-based World

Wildlife Fund.

There are already whaling sanctuaries in the Indian Ocean and off Mexico's Pacific coast.

The proposal by France tops the agenda for the five-day conference beginning Monday in the Pacific resort of Puerto Vallarta.

It calls for a ban of at least 50 years on all whaling below a latitude of 40 degrees south — a vast watery tract that surrounds Antarctica and touches the southern extremes of South America and New Zealand.

The World Wide Fund for Nature says at least 21 na-

tions favor the ban and six are opposed. A sanctuary must be approved by three-fourths of those voting.

"We believe sanctuary is a winnable proposition," said Pam Eiser, an Australian delegate and member of the conservation group.

Conservationists say the sanctuary would counter a rise in "scientific research" whaling, an exemption in the 1982 moratorium that has allowed hundreds of whale catches a year. Whaling opponents say much of the supposed scientific research is a pretext for commercial whaling.

In Norway, whale steaks and sausages are a delicacy, while the meat of some species can fetch more than \$100 a kilogram in Japan.

Japan proposes instead to open Antarctic waters to limited commercial hunts of the minke whale, the last abundant species of great whales.

Alan Macnow, a New York-based consultant for the Japanese Whaling Association, argues that an Antarctic sanctuary is unnecessary because adequate restrictions already exist. Limited commercial hunting off Antarctica would put licensed whaling ships in a position to spot poachers, he

said.

"With a sanctuary, however, poaching is more likely because there is no money for enforcement and the costs of patrolling 11 million sq. miles (28.5 million sq. km) will be prohibitive," said Macnow.

A year ago, Norway angered conservationists by ignoring the 1982 ban and allowing commercial whaling. Norway says the minke whales off its coasts are not endangered.

Conservationists say an Antarctic haven could protect as many as 90 percent of the 3.5 million great whales estimated to be left.