

## Apparent Violations of Canada's Marine Mammal Regulations

Canada's commercial seal hunt is managed by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), which, in 1993, released new Marine Mammal Regulations under Canada's Fisheries Act – the major piece of legislation under which the seal hunt is conducted. The Marine Mammal Regulations state the way in which the hunt should be conducted.



WWW.IFAW.ORG

### **The Marine Mammal Regulations clearly state what the government sees as enforceable regulations.**

The Marine Mammal Regulations include a description of how seals should be killed, with what tools, where, when and by whom. For instance, the regulations state that sealers may only kill seals with hakapiks, round, heavy clubs, rifles and shotguns. In addition, sealers using hakapiks and clubs must strike the seal on the forehead until the skull is crushed and then must perform a blinking reflex test or manually check the skull. Hunters must administer blinking reflex tests as soon as possible to confirm that the seal is dead before proceeding to skin it. Sealers are not allowed to skin or bleed seals until they are dead.

### **IFAW has documented many apparent violations of the Marine Mammal Regulations.**

Despite these explicit regulations, IFAW has videotaped evidence of sealers using what appear to be illegal weapons to kill seals, hooking live seals and dragging them across the ice, failing to administer blinking reflex tests and even the skinning and bleeding of live seals. This apparent disregard for the regulations has been observed and documented repeatedly during IFAW's annual trips to Canada's commercial seal hunt.

### **The DFO does not adequately monitor hunt.**

The Canadian government claims the seal hunt is "closely monitored and tightly regulated." Because the seal hunt involves thousands of sealers hunting over hundreds of square miles of ice and water, it becomes nearly impossible to monitor and regulate effectively. A 2005 report by an Independent Veterinarians' Working Group stated that the DFO does not have sufficient capacity to monitor the hunt or enforce its regulations.

### **The DFO does not prosecute the majority of violators.**

IFAW has submitted video evidence of nearly 700 apparent violations of the Marine Mammal Regulations to the DFO and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). Despite all of the evidence, charges have rarely been laid.

**IFAW has been alerting Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans of apparent sealing violations for over 10 years. Members of the organization continue to observe the hunt year after year to bring international attention to the cruelty of the commercial seal hunt.**



Photos: © D. White / IFAW

## Economics of the Seal Hunt

Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) insists that the commercial seal hunt is a self-sustaining, market-driven enterprise. However, in the last decade the Canadian government and the DFO have financially supported the commercial seal hunt and worked to keep it operable instead of finding a sustainable economic alternative for Atlantic Canadians.



WWW.IFAW.ORG

### Canada's seal hunt is not economically justifiable.

The Canadian government claims that the seal hunt is market-driven and economically viable. However, from 1995-2000 both the Canadian government and the government of Newfoundland and Labrador provided \$20 million of direct subsidies to the sealing industry including direct payment to sealers. As a result, the number of seals killed during this time period skyrocketed to levels not seen in the previous 30 years.

### Indirect subsidies and tax breaks continue to support the seal hunt.

Although neither government currently makes direct financial contribution to the commercial seal hunt, support – such as government funding for ice breaking vessels and tax breaks – continues to aid the seal hunt. For example, the government of Newfoundland and Labrador is working to ensure a retroactive tax exemption for sealers who have not been paying the Harmonized Sales Tax on pelts they have sold. Over the past 3 years alone, this could amount to a \$6.3 million “tax break” for the sealing industry.

### No one makes a living from sealing

The Canadian government claims that sealing provides valuable income to sealers and their families in eastern Canada. Because the seal hunt takes place over a very short period of time in an off-season for fishing, the industry is a seasonal enterprise. For the majority of sealers, this income from the seal hunt represents a small part of their annual income.

### The Canadian seal hunt costs Canadian taxpayers money.

Considerable amounts of Canadian taxpayer dollars continue to be spent annually on the seal hunt. At this time, the Canadian government is subsidizing research into the development of new seal products, construction and upgrading of seal processing plants, government promotion of the seal hunt in Europe as well as developing new markets for seal-derived products.

### Sealing is a poor investment.

The Canadian seal hunt requires a significant amount of financial and governmental support, including the costs of management and research, costs of promoting the hunt and the cost to Canada's reputation abroad. However, the hunt's financial return for Atlantic Canada – and for the entire country – represents less than one-half of one percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

### Canada's commercial seal hunt is wasteful.

Most of the seal carcasses are left on the ice and a recent report from Memorial University indicates that about 80% of the blubber is discarded.

**IFAW has been researching the economics surrounding Canada's commercial seal hunt for more than a decade. Experts and scientists with IFAW continually study the sustainability of the hunt and urge Canadian law-makers to recognize the incredible costs to taxpayers and to Canada's international reputation.**



Photos: © D. White / IFAW

## IFAW's Hunt Watch

Canada's commercial seal hunt occurs each spring off the East coast of Canada. Soon after the harp seal population gives birth to its pups on the ice floes, sealers descend on the ice to hunt young beater seals for their pelts. Every year, IFAW staff observe and document this hunt.



WWW.IFAW.ORG

### **IFAW is the only organization to consistently observe and document the Canadian commercial harp seal hunt.**

The observation and documentation of the hunt is important. By documenting the hunt, we are able to bring the images of it to the public – one of the most important tools we have in ending the largest remaining commercial hunt of marine mammals in the world. IFAW also brings key politicians to the ice to inform policy makers about the seal hunt in order to help create and support legislation to ban seal-derived products.

### **IFAW observes the hunt each year and documents apparent violations of Canada's Marine Mammal Regulations.**

We routinely document apparent violations of the Marine Mammal Regulations including the skinning of live seals, and also observe the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' (DFO) inability to monitor the hunt.

### **IFAW's non-confrontational approach has granted us access to the hunt for over ten years.**

Because of our long history of peaceful observation of the hunt, the DFO grants IFAW representatives, and IFAW-introduced journalists and VIPs with permits to view the hunt each year. The footage we gather is submitted to the DFO and the RCMP when the hunt is over for review and enforcement, and is also used in IFAW's campaign to save the seals.

### **The Canadian seal hunt is a large-scale hunt over a wide-spread area.**

The Canadian commercial seal hunt occurs in two areas of the Northwest Atlantic – the Gulf of St. Lawrence (near the Magdalene Islands), and the 'Front'; an area northeast of Newfoundland. Because the hunt is spread out over such a large area of ice and water, DFO monitoring and enforcement of the hunt is particularly difficult to do.

### **IFAW primarily observes and documents the hunt in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.**

IFAW traditionally films the hunt in the Gulf of St. Lawrence because it's easier to gain access to this area. However, our ability to film in the Gulf is increasingly uncertain given the rapidly thinning ice in the area. On the Front, seal hunting occurs up to 200 miles offshore; distances that make it impossible for helicopters to reach the area. Airplanes can reach the hunt, but the height at which they must fly at makes it difficult to observe at close range.

**IFAW has been campaigning to end Canada's commercial seal hunt for over 30 years. For ten years, IFAW has been traveling to the Gulf of St. Lawrence to document the hunt. Campaigners witness the cruelty of the hunt every March in order to raise global awareness of this inhumane slaughter of at times more than 350,000 marine mammals.**



Photos: © D. White / IFAW

## Trade Bans on Seal Products

International opposition to Canada's commercial seal hunt has increased over the last 30 years. As a result, many governments have responded by implementing trade bans on the importation of seal products. These bans are designed to eliminate key markets from the seal trade and to send a strong message to the Canadian government urging it to end this cruel hunt.



WWW.IFAW.ORG

**January 2007** – The Belgian Parliament adopted the first national ban on all seal and seal-derived products in the European Union.

**November 2006** – The Council of Europe adopted a resolution which urges European governments to consider banning trade all seal-derived products.

**October 2006** – The German Parliament unanimously voted on a Motion to work towards a European ban on the importation of seal products and to discuss the institution of a temporary ban in Germany until the EU ban is adopted.

**October 2006** – The European Parliament adopted a resolution supporting a Europe-wide ban on all imports of seal derived products.

**March 2006** – The Croatian government banned the import of seal products into Croatia.

**February 2006** – The Italian Parliament temporarily suspended the import of sealskins and seal derived products. A legislative proposal to prohibit the commerce in seal products has been announced.

**January 2006** – Mexico banned the import and export of all marine mammals (including seals) and their derived products.

**January 2006** – Greenland instructed its public state company, Great Greenland, not to trade in seal pelts originating from Canada's commercial seal hunt.

**December 2005** – The Dutch Parliament initiated a legislative proposal to ban the import, export and marketing of harp and hooded seals and their derived products.

**April 2005** – The Austrian Parliament adopted a resolution condemning the Canadian commercial seal hunt.

**May 2004** – The Belgian Government adopted a legislative proposal to ban the import/export and marketing of all seal products.

**2004** – The Council of Europe adopted a Motion for a Resolution urging the government of Canada to end the needless slaughter of harp and hooded seals.

**November 2003** – The United States Senate introduced a resolution urging the government of Canada to end the needless slaughter of harp and hooded seals.



Photos: © D. White / IFAW

## Trade Bans on Seal Products *continued*

**October 1983** – The European Community imposed a ban on seal products derived from whitecoats (newborn harp seals less than 12 days old) and bluebacks (young hooded seals, less than one year old). This ban was renewed in 1985 and made permanent in 1989.

**1972** – The United States implemented the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), which prohibits the import/export and marketing of all marine mammal products.

**IFAW has worked to raise awareness and support for the implementation of trade bans on seal products. Currently, country offices in the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, France and Belgium are working diligently to support the impending EU ban on all seal products.**



WWW.IFAW.ORG



Photos: © D. White / IFAW

## IFAW's Seal Watch

Each February, thousands of harp seals migrate to the Gulf of St. Lawrence to bear and nurse their young on the ice floes. IFAW's Seal Watch provides a rare opportunity for travelers of all ages and abilities to safely come in close contact with the seals without harming or negatively impacting their habitat.



WWW.IFAW.ORG

### What is Seal Watch?

IFAW's Seal Watch is designed to bring guests to the ice without jeopardizing the harp seal populations that congregate for whelping. IFAW's visitors to the ice learn about seals, their habitats and also about Canada's commercial seal hunt, which threatens the very same seals in only a matter of days.

### Seal Watch benefits seals.

Visitors to the ice are able to come in close contact with young seals and their mothers and are able to witness the incredible beauty of this natural setting. Because of this, Seal Watch promotes public awareness and appreciation of seals. Participants often develop a deep appreciation for the animals they encounter and do their part to protect the species.

### Seal Watch is important for political change.

IFAW uses Seal Watch as an opportunity to bring politicians and decision makers to the ice floes to familiarize them with the key topics surrounding seals and sealing. During Seal Watch, IFAW experts work to inform policy makers about the species and Canada's commercial seal hunt in order to gain support for IFAW's global and regional efforts.

### Seal Watch offers a good example of responsible eco-tourism.

Eco-tourism is a travel opportunity that provides revenue to local communities without adversely affecting the environment. Seal Watch is a good example of responsible eco-tourism as it provides Atlantic Canada an economic alternative to seal hunting and has little negative impact on seals and their critical habitat.

Here are some personal accounts from past Seal Watch participants.

*"The seals make blowholes so they can get in and out of the water. We headed to one and laid down on the ice. We shielded our heads with our arms to block the light. We saw seals swimming deep in the water in their natural environment. Some were swimming on their backs, looking up at us. It almost looked like they were waving with their flippers. It was incredible to watch."*

*"We had an amazing experience with the seals. I'm still in awe that my daughter and I had such an opportunity."*

*"We saw a fat 'whitecoat' that was four or five days old. We all took turns taking pictures. I was surprised that the fur was thick, but soft looking. The baby's face was so cute."*

**For more than 10 years, IFAW has been promoting responsible eco-tourism and organizing Seal Watch. Each year, IFAW not only facilitates these heartwarming encounters between people and seals, but also strives to educate the public about harp seals and how Canada's annual commercial seal hunt puts the sustainability of the species at risk. For more information on Seal Watch, harp seals and the commercial hunt that threatens them, visit [www.ifaw.org](http://www.ifaw.org).**



Photos: © D. White / IFAW

## Seals and Fish Stocks

Fishermen often blamed seals for the collapse of the North Atlantic fish stocks in the early 1990s. The fishermen's claim was simply that seals were "eating all the fish." Today, scientists – and even most fishermen – agree that seals did not cause the collapse of the cod stocks. In reality, the cause was overfishing and failures in fisheries management.

**Seals eat more than just cod** – Harp seals eat a wide variety of fish and marine invertebrates, but most of them have no commercial value to fishermen. Although seals do eat some cod, their diet also consists of species which prey on cod. In addition, harp seals eat crab, crustaceans, krill and capelin.

**Culling seals won't restore fish stocks** – Scientists do not believe that removing seals will in any way bring back the cod stocks in the Northwest Atlantic. In fact, some scientists believe that the chances for recovery of the fishery may be threatened by removing seals. Since seals also eat predators of commercially-important fish, then fewer seals would actually mean fewer fish for fishermen.

**Seals are not responsible for the collapse of cod stocks** – Scientific surveys show that harp seals have only about 3% cod in their diet and are not responsible for depleting cod stocks or impeding their recovery. Many other factors, particularly overfishing and mismanagement as well as environmental conditions have contributed to the collapse of the cod stock and other fisheries. In fact, a study conducted by DFO scientists revealed that fishing accounted for 46% of large cod mortality while seals accounted for a mere 1%. The most significant predator of small cod was large cod and other large fish, which accounted for 65%.

**Because of the complex food web in the North Atlantic region, simply culling seals will not lead to an increase in fisheries** – Ocean ecosystems are complicated, therefore simply removing one predator will not increase fisheries. In reality, there are many predators in marine ecosystems, most of them consuming many different prey species. It is likely that any 'saved fish' from a seal cull would only be eliminated by other predators before the stock reached maturity.

**IFAW continues to reject the claim that seals were the cause of the depleted fish stocks in the North Atlantic or that they are currently impeding their recovery. The marine food web is far too complex for such a simple solution. IFAW agrees with scientists who believe that a cull of seals could actually be detrimental to the ecosystem, further hindering the replenishment of fish stocks in the North Atlantic region.**



WWW.IFAW.ORG

## Seals and Global Warming

Global warming is having a profound affect on marine mammals. Scientists have agreed that global warming specifically affects ice-breeding species such as harp and hooded seals. A decrease in sea ice cover due to increased temperatures threatens the breeding and nursing conditions for harp and hooded seals off the East Coast of Canada.



WWW.IFAW.ORG

**Global warming affects seal habitats** – Over the past few years, global warming has begun to inhibit the formation of sea ice in the world's northern regions. These regions, which include the East Coast of Canada, have experienced a decrease in ice formation during the time when harp and hooded seals require ice for giving birth and nursing their young. Scientists have recorded poorer-than-average ice conditions off the East Coast of Canada for the past 9 out of 11 years.

**Ice is critical whelping habitat for harp and hooded seals** – Harp and hooded seals require stable ice platforms for the birthing and nursing of their pups. The break-up of stable ice platforms disrupts the nursing period necessary for survival and leads to an increase in pup mortality.

**Young seal pups require ice platforms** – Once a seal pup has been weaned from its mother's milk, the mother abandons the pup on the ice. At this time, the pup is unable to catch its own food until it develops the necessary skills for survival. Since global warming contributes to premature ice break-up, many seals in this vulnerable stage often die underwater, become fatally trapped in slushy conditions or are crushed in loose-pack ice. In fact, Canadian government scientists estimate that in 2002, 75% of the pups in the Gulf of St. Lawrence died before the hunt even began.

**The Canadian government has not adjusted the total allowable catch to reflect increased mortality caused by global warming** – Over the past five years, the Canadian government has continued to increase the total allowable catch (TAC) for harp seals. By increasing the TAC, the government has failed to take into account the number of seals that are dying every year due to the reduced availability of sea ice for birthing and nursing. As a result, the large number of seals that are taken at the hunt coupled with the increase in pup mortality poses an increased risk of depleting the population.

**The Canadian government's overall approach to managing the seal hunt risks seriously depleting the harp seal population** – A recent scientific study examined the Canadian government's approach for determining population status and trends for Northwest Atlantic harp seals. It found that Canada's management approach is likely to maintain a high TAC, despite a declining population. This approach could lead to the depletion of the harp seal population by as much as 50% to 70% over the next 15 years.

**IFAW recognizes the threat that global warming has on the environment and specifically ice-breeding marine mammals. In recognition of the magnitude of this threat, IFAW urges policy makers to incorporate the effects of climate change by adopting the strictest precautionary measures in all policies and decisions affecting the welfare and conservation of marine mammals.**



Photos: © D. White / IFAW

## The Inhumane Killing of Seals

Despite evidence to the contrary, the Canadian government and pro-hunt organizations continue to state that Canada's commercial seal hunt is acceptably humane. This hunt occurs on boats and shifting ice pans, which leads to unpredictable hunting conditions. These unreliable conditions lead to killing methods that are imprecise and often result in the unnecessary suffering of wounded seals.



WWW.IFAW.ORG

**Unpredictable conditions lead to inhumane killing** – The seal hunt takes place in unpredictable and unmanageable conditions (for example, seals and sealers on slippery ice, seals in the water, sealers shooting from vessels bobbing in the water, among others). In this environment, many seals are not killed in the first attempt and are left to suffer on the ice. This has led some experts to conclude that this hunt can never satisfy the requirements of a humane hunt.

**Seals are often “struck and lost”** – Many seals are injured by sealers only to escape or fall into the water where they eventually die from their wounds. These animals are deemed “struck and lost.” When sealers cannot control hunting conditions – such as in recent years when the ice is thin and unstable – more seals are likely to suffer and die under the ice.

**Hunting from a distance can cause lengthy periods of suffering for seals** – Because of the difficult location of the hunt, sealers may attempt to shoot and kill seals from their fishing vessels which can be hundreds of feet away. In this situation, accuracy is limited and seals are often wounded instead of quickly killed. These seals are then left suffering on the ice until the sealer can reach the area to administer fatal blows or the animal escapes into the water where it will almost certainly die from its wounds.

**The Canadian government has discussed the possibility of outlawing the use of hakapiks (a wooden club with a metal hook on top)** – Outlawing hakapiks will not increase the humaneness of Canada's commercial seal hunt. Allowing a rifle-only hunt would lead to an increase in sealers shooting animals in the water. A 2005 veterinary panel recommended banning this practice, as it is inhumane and leads to an increase in “struck and lost” seals. The only solution to ending the cruelty of the hunt is to end the hunt itself.

**IFAW has been observing Canada's commercial seal hunt for over thirty-five years. Our presence on the ice sends a strong message to the Canadian government that its cruel and unsustainable hunt will not go unseen. IFAW has diligently worked in Canada and abroad to support trade bans on all seal-derived products, and will continue its worldwide work to end the largest hunt for marine mammals.**



Photos: © D. White / IFAW