

Why is IFAW opposed to the commercial seal hunt?

1 The commercial seal hunt is unacceptably cruel.

Two recent veterinary reports on the Canadian seal hunt have documented unacceptable levels of cruelty. The hunt is a highly competitive activity, carried out over an extensive area, and under very unpredictable conditions. Speed, not humaneness, is the rule, as hunters rush to kill as many seals as possible in the short time available to them. Year after year, seal hunt observers report abuses such as hooking and skinning live seals. Since 1998, IFAW has compiled clear video evidence of more than 660 acts of cruelty.

2 The seal hunt is not sustainable.

More than 350,000 seals were killed in 2006 alone – well over the Canadian government's estimate of the "sustainable yield." A recent analysis of the Canadian government's management approach found that it risks depleting the seal population by up to 70% within the next 15 years. Meanwhile, Canada and Greenland hunt the same population of harp seals but do not cooperate in the management of their hunts.

3 The seal hunt is not economically viable.

There is little economic justification for Canada's commercial seal hunt. In the late 1990s, the Canadian government provided an estimated \$20 million dollars in subsidies to the sealing industry. The sealing industry takes subsidies away from legitimate growth on Canada's east coast, and threatens existing local industries such as tourism because it tarnishes Canada's international image.



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Why is IFAW still going up to the hunt after 30+ years of working on this issue?

IFAW is committed to exposing Canada's cruel seal hunt to the world. Every year, IFAW staff documents the hunt and makes footage and images available to the world's news markets and across the internet. In addition, IFAW documents and catalogs any apparent violations of the Marine Mammal Regulations and reports these alleged violations to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) as evidence for prosecution.

I thought IFAW had won this campaign?

In the 1980s, hunting of harp and hooded seals in Canada was greatly reduced as a result of the European Union ban on the import of baby seal pelts (whitecoats and bluebacks). However, in 1996 the Canadian government raised the total allowable catch (TAC) and introduced subsidies to encourage a larger hunt targeting seal pups as young as twelve days old (ragged-jackets) that are not covered by the European ban. The fight is now back on to end Canada's commercial seal hunt, and IFAW has heated up its campaign through national and international political pressure and public education efforts.

Are seals responsible for the collapse of cod fisheries?

No. DFO's own scientists recognize that there is a complete lack of scientific evidence to suggest that seals contributed to the decline in cod stocks. Over-fishing and mismanagement by the Canadian government were the main causes of the fish stock collapse.



Are seals overpopulated?

No. Seals do not reach sexual maturity until 5 – 6 years of age. The current seal hunt targets very young seals, 98% are less than three months of age with some as young as twelve days old, and the effect of hunting this population will not be seen for several years. Nonetheless, the impacts of high kill levels since 1995 are starting to appear: the most recent DFO survey indicates that the recovery of the harp seal herd has stopped and the numbers of pups born is starting to decrease. In addition, global warming is impacting the harp seal's breeding habitat, causing higher than normal pup mortality. For example, government scientists estimate that in 2002, 75% of the pups in the Gulf of St. Lawrence died due to a lack of ice before the hunt even began. Government scientists now report that the population is declining.

How are seals killed today?

Seals are killed with clubs, hakapiks (heavy clubs with a steel pick on one end) and rifles. Due to the decreasing amount of ice cover, more seals are shot at from boats in open water. Depending on the timing of the hunt, up to 50% of harp seals that are shot at in open water may be fatally wounded but retreat beneath the surface of the water where they die slowly and are never recovered.

What does the DFO consider an apparent violation? Are these abuses still being committed?

Failing to perform a blink reflex test or checking to ensure the skull is crushed prior to skinning contravenes Canada's Marine Mammal Regulations. Skinning live seals, which is also observed, clearly violates the regulations. Hooking and dragging live seals involves levels of cruelty that would not normally be tolerated in modern society. Nonetheless, year after year, sealers continue to commit these acts of cruelty in view of IFAW's observers.

What kinds of seal products are on the market?

- **Seal pelts** – The fur of a harp seal is coarse. While some fur is used for coats, due to its rough quality most is used as fashion embellishments like fur trim; and for souvenirs like key chains and wallets.
- **Seal meat** for human consumption is sold in Newfoundland and the Magdalene Islands, but difficult to sell elsewhere given its appearance, taste and texture.
- **Seal oil for human consumption** – sold as a supplement for Omega 3 fatty acids, it competes in a market already crowded with cheaper, more popular alternatives. Recently, Memorial University in Newfoundland reported that 80% of the seal blubber from Canada's commercial seal hunt is discarded.
- **Seal oil for animal feed** – used as an additive, it is still under development and markets have not yet been established.
- **Seal penises** – sold in Asia for use as aphrodisiacs. With the current hunt concentrating on pups, few adult male penises are collected.

But isn't the seal hunt important to the Canadian or Newfoundland economy?

Sealing is not a primary income industry; it takes place over a very short period of the year in an off-season for fishing. For the majority of sealers, the income from the seal hunt represents a small part of their annual income. According to Canadian government statistics, the seal hunt accounts for less than one-half of one percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Any money earned at the hunt is used to supplement other forms of income.



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Does the Canadian government really subsidize the seal hunt?

Yes. In the late 1990s, an estimated \$20 million in subsidies were pumped into Canada's commercial seal hunt by the Canadian federal government and the provincial government of Newfoundland and Labrador. This financial support caused the number of harp seals killed to skyrocket to levels not seen in the previous 30 years. Currently, the Canadian government does not directly subsidize the hunt as it did in the 1990s, however, Canadian taxpayer dollars are still spent on the hunt. Taxpayer support includes: funding research to develop new seal products, construction and upgrading of seal processing plants, coast guard icebreaking services to lead sealers to the seals, and government promotion of the seal hunt in Europe and elsewhere around the world.



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Is IFAW opposed to Inuit people hunting seals for subsistence purposes?

No. IFAW differentiates between subsistence and commercial hunting and has repeatedly stated that it is not opposed to traditional subsistence hunting by native peoples.

How are seals affected by global warming?

Global warming is reducing the availability of the ice sheets in the North Atlantic regions. Harp seals require a solid and stable ice platform on which to give birth and nurse their pups. A lack of ice is, therefore, a major conservation threat to the species. In recent years, poor ice conditions off the East Coast of Canada have caused above normal rates of pup mortality. In spite of this, the Canadian government has continued to increase the total allowable catch (TAC) for harp seals in recent years, and catches continue to exceed sustainable levels, putting the population at increased risk of depletion.

Is it true that seal pups are no longer hunted in Canada's modern commercial seal hunt?

No. Although the commercial hunting of whitecoats (young harp seal pups 0-12 days old) and blue-backs (young hooded seal pups under 1 year of age) has been prohibited since 1987, to suggest that the seals now hunted are no longer pups or not vulnerable is simply untrue. Currently, about 98% of the harp seals killed in the Canadian hunt are newly-weaned pups between 2 weeks and 3 months of age. Most of them have not taken their first swim, nor eaten their first solid food at the time they are killed.

Is rifle hunting more humane than clubbing?

No. Since rifle hunting often occurs at a long range and in unstable conditions, accuracy is often minimal, resulting in wounded seals and undue suffering. Rifle hunting also leads to an increase in the number of seals that are "struck and lost." These are seals that are wounded by a sealer but slip into the water and sink before the sealer reaches them to administer fatal blows and recover the body. Most of these seals experience a slow and painful death.

Would IFAW consider buying out sealers and/or their permits?

Traditionally, in Canada, the government buys up licenses after closing a particular fishery. At the present time, there really is no mechanism for IFAW to buy out sealers and/or their permits. It is highly unlikely that such a buy out program would effectively reduce the number of sealers hunting seals.

Isn't hunting seals similar to the killing of farmed animals for the food industry?

Unlike abattoirs, the seal hunt is an unpredictable, unmanageable hunt for wild animals which takes place under dangerous and hurried conditions. It is precisely these conditions that have led some experts to conclude that this hunt can never satisfy the requirements of a humane hunt.

