



# The Canadian Seal Hunt

## *A way of life*

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■ *The coastal peoples of Canada have survived for hundreds of years on what nature provides. Sealing is still an essential part of that way of life.*

- Seal hunting remains an important part of Canada's cultural heritage.
- Seals have been harvested for food, fuel, clothing, shelter and other products.
- Remote fishing communities offer few employment opportunities. Many sealers would be forced to leave their homes if unable to hunt seals.

### Economic value

■ *The commercial hunting of seals is critical to the livelihood of more than 6,000 sealers in rural communities across Atlantic Canada, Quebec and the North.*

- Sealing can provide as much as 35% of a sealer's annual income, which is approximately C\$25,000/€15,750.
- In 2006 the value of the harvest to the economy was in excess of C\$55m (approx. €34m) in Newfoundland and Labrador and C\$1m (approx. €0.62m) in Nunavut.

### Sustainability

■ *Sealing in Canada is a sustainable and economically viable activity.*

- Seal populations are managed using a precautionary framework and quotas are set annually based on peer-reviewed scientific advice.
- Seal quotas are determined on the basis of an ecosystem approach and considerations such as ice conditions, climate and abundance of seal herds.

### Humaneness

■ *The management of Canada's seal hunts is supported by regulations, monitoring and enforcement.*

- Sealers are required to carry out a three-step process of stunning/killing, confirmation of unconsciousness and effective bleeding. This process—originally recommended in 2005 by the Independent Veterinarians Working Group—is consistent with the recommendations of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).
- The three-step process is designed to ensure that seals are not skinned alive. They are to be skinned only after death has been assured by effective bleeding.
- Whitecoat seal pups are not commercially hunted in Canada. This has been illegal since 1987.

### Harp seal populations

■ *The current population of harp seals in Canada is an estimated 5.5 million—triple what it was in the early 1970s.*

- Canada conducts rigorous monitoring and assessment programs on a regular basis.
- One million harp seal pups are born each year.

### Fish consumption

■ *Seals eat large quantities of a variety of fish and are part of a complex ecosystem.*

- At current population levels, harp seals off Canada's East coast consume about 6 million tonnes of fish per year—three million tonnes of that amount in the same region where the total annual commercial seafood landings are 0.9 million tonnes.
- The 600,000 hooded seals, 300,000 grey seals, ringed, bearded and harbour seals also consume large amounts of fish.
- Seals frequently swim up rivers to feed, eat the bait from traps, and cause significant damage to aquaculture and fishing gear.

### Use of seal products

■ *Canada exports seal products to EU Member States (32%), Norway, China and other emerging markets.*

- Seal oil is an excellent source of Omega 3 and has been marketed in capsule form in Canada, Europe and Asia for the past 10 years.
- New and promising research out of Europe has determined that harp seal heart valves are superior to those currently used in human heart valve transplants. It is thought that demand could be as high as 300,000 valves per year, at a cost of roughly C\$5,000 (€3,400) each.

### Trade challenge

Although the Government of Canada would prefer to resolve the issue of trade in seal products through dialogue with the EU, it will consider all available options when it comes to defending the legitimate economic interests of Canada's humane seal hunts and sealers, including trade challenges should these be necessary.

**For further information** on seals and sealing, consult the Fisheries and Oceans Canada website: <http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/seal-phoque/>

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