

THE CANADIAN SEAL CULL

Every year, thousands of baby harp seals are killed on the ice floes off the coast of Canada. This slaughter is encouraged by the Canadian government, which sets a quota for the number of seals to be killed. It is the largest marine mammal hunt in the world.



FACTS ABOUT SEALS



The main seal species hunted is the harp seal. The Northwest Atlantic population of seals travel between the Canadian Arctic and Greenland, coming to Canada's east coast to give birth. The mothers have a single pup in late February to early March. The pups plump up quickly, becoming fat fluffy

'whitecoats', thanks to the high fat content of their mothers' milk. They are fed for two weeks by their mothers before being left to fend for themselves. At this stage, the babies are called 'beaters', because they are unable to swim and when the ice melts they fall into the water and beat it with their flippers to keep afloat. They slowly learn to swim and begin looking for food. In 2007, Canada estimated that there were 5.5 million seals in the Northwest Atlantic population.

WHY ARE SEALS KILLED IN CANADA?

The seals are primarily killed for their fur, which is sold in European and Russian fur markets to be turned into clothing, but the Canadian government is trying to encourage the processing of their blubber for oil, which is high in omega 3 fatty acids. Seal meat is not eaten and the carcasses are usually left behind on the ice.

The Canadian government says that the harp seal population is thriving and can be 'managed' and 'harvested' to provide an income for coastal communities.

Every year, the government sets a 'quota' – the number of seals to be killed. The total quota was 338,200 seals in 2009, including 280,000 harp seals, 50,000 grey seals and 8,200 hooded seals. The government claims that the quotas will keep the population at a sustainable and stable size. The killing season runs from November to May, but most of the killing takes place between March and May.

The seals are killed primarily by fishermen, who are earning some extra money outside the fishing season. The hunt takes place on the ice off the east coast of Canada. It starts in the Gulf of St Lawrence to the west of Newfoundland and then moves on to the 'Front' (northeast of Newfoundland).



Because of a huge outcry in the 1980s, the fishermen are not allowed to kill the baby seals when they have their white coats. Instead, they must wait until their coats have gone grey – which means that they still may be only 10-12 days old! 95% of the harp seals killed are younger than 4 months old.

WHY SHOULD THE KILLING STOP?



The seal hunt is unnecessary

The fur is not needed – we have gorgeous, warm, modern, and, above all, humane materials with which to make clothing, boots, etc. We do not need to kill seals to provide fur. The seal population will naturally manage itself to a level that can be sustained by the available resources in the environment.

The Canadian government says that the coastal communities need to make money from the seals to survive, but most communities in Newfoundland reported that less than 5% of their income came from sealing.

The seal hunt is cruel

The seals are not killed humanely. They are shot with guns or hit with hakapiks – the clubs that look like ice picks. Death by hakapik or shooting is often not quick or painless. Shot or clubbed seals sometimes escape and die slowly from their wounds. These victims are not counted towards the overall quota.

The sealers are supposed to touch the eyes of the seals they have killed to make sure they do not blink – to check that they are dead. However, sealers have been seen hitting or shooting one animal and proceeding to try to kill another seal without checking whether the first is dead. A veterinarian's report in 2001 found that almost half of the seals it examined seemed to have been conscious when skinned, causing 'considerable and unacceptable suffering'. The sealers are paid by the number of skins they collect, so they are often working as quickly as they can.

Veterinarians and seal hunt observers have seen live seals being hooked and dragged across the ice, to ensure that they cannot escape before being clubbed.

A report produced in 2005 by a group of independent vets said that the 'competitive nature of the hunt ... creates an environment in which speed is the rule, and hunters may be encouraged to take shortcuts.'

Climate change

Global warming means that the ice is often thin and patchy – so a lot of the pups drown before they can swim. Canadian scientists said that most of the pups born in the Gulf of St Lawrence in 2007 were likely to have died before the seal hunt began, because of the ice conditions. The harp seal population is getting smaller because of the hunt and the poor ice conditions.

EU victory for the seals

In May 2009, following months of lobbying by campaign groups and members of the public, MEPs voted overwhelmingly to ban trading in all seal products. This means that national bans on commercial trading in seal products will exist in 57 countries worldwide including the US and all the 27 countries of the EU. Europe's fur markets are the biggest buyers of Canada's seal pelts, so it should be a huge blow to the Canadian seal hunt!

WHAT YOU CAN DO!

- **Collect signatures for our petition against the seal cull. Copies of the petition can be downloaded from our website or ordered from the office.**
- **Write to the Canadian High Commissioner and email the Canadian Prime Minister asking them to stop the seal hunt. See our website for points to cover in your email and letter, plus contact addresses.**
- **Don't travel to Canada – travellers from the UK are worth \$1 billion to Canada. Write to the Canadian Tourism Commission and let them know why you won't be going. Maggie Davison, Managing Director, Canadian Tourism Commission (UK), Canada House, 62-65 Trafalgar Square, London, WC2N 5DY.**



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