



Seals and Sealing in Canada

2006



Seals and Sealing in Canada 2006

Prepared by Sheryl Fink

Unless otherwise noted, photos are by Stewart Cook,
Gulf of St. Lawrence, 2005.

All photos ©IFAW

Front cover: Seal pup and sealing vessel, the day before the re-opening of the 2005 Gulf hunt.

This page: Seal pup splashing in a pool of water on the ice.

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Each spring, the East coast of Canada is host to one of the world's great wildlife spectacles. It is here that female harp seals congregate by the hundreds of thousands on newly formed sea ice to give birth to their pups.

The adult seals have arrived here from their summer feeding areas in the eastern Canadian Arctic and off West Greenland. They move ahead of the ice edge as it forms, arriving at the southern end of their range in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and off the coast of Newfoundland by early January.

The seals give birth from late February until mid-March, transforming the once barren ice floes into a huge, white nursery. The newborn pups – thin, scraggly and yellow at birth – will become fat, fluffy “whitecoats” in about a week, thanks to the high fat content of their mothers’ milk. The pups spend much of their time sleeping, and are so inactive that on sunny days the ice melts beneath them, creating body-shaped cradles on the ice surface. After about 12 days, the mothers will leave their fully fed pups and join adult males for the annual mating ritual. Later in the season the adult seals, along with many immature, non-breeding seals (called “bedlamers”), will haul out on ice further north to undergo the annual moult. They then continue their migration back to the subarctic waters between eastern Canada and West Greenland.

The newly-weaned pups remain on the ice, crying for their mothers at first, before becoming extremely quiet and sedentary. During this time they survive on the thick layer of blubber accumulated during nursing. Soon, they begin to moult their white coats, and can be seen rolling on their backs, rubbing the ice as if trying to scratch an unbearable itch. A few days later, their white coats will be lost entirely to reveal the sleek, black-spotted, silvery pelt of the young harp seal pup known as a “beater.”

It is this pelt that is now the target for commercial sealers, who have been waiting nearby, eager to make a few dollars from the skins that will feed the luxury fur market. In recent years over 300,000 seal pups – about a third of those born each year – have been killed by sealers before they reach three months of age.

The Canadian seal hunt is the world's largest remaining commercial hunt for any marine mammal. The majority of seals are killed in a matter of days. Unlike most hunts, this one targets animals that are only a few weeks old. Unlike most hunts, the skinned carcasses are left on the ice to rot. This is truly a “hunt” like no other.

This whitecoated harp seal pup is protected ... for now. In about a week's time – as soon as she starts to shed her white fur – she will be fair game for the sealers.



What's Wrong with Canada's Commercial Seal Hunt?

Since its inception in 1969, IFAW has fought to end Canada's commercial seal hunt. Today, we remain opposed to the hunt because:

1. It is unacceptably cruel.
2. The number of seals being killed is not biologically sustainable, and the current management approach places the harp seal herd at unacceptable risk of depletion.
3. There is no scientific reason to cull harp seals.
4. Canada's commercial seal hunt is not economically justifiable, and requires government subsidies to exist.
5. The commercial seal hunt runs against public opinion in Canada and around the world.

1. Canada's commercial seal hunt is unacceptably cruel.

The Canadian harp seal 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. In many years quotas have been reached in less than a week.

Year after year, seal hunt observers report abuses such as the hooking and dragging of live seals across the ice; seals clubbed (often with illegal weapons) or shot and left to suffer on the ice before being clubbed again some time



thereafter; and seals skinned while conscious. Although it is required by law, few sealers are observed checking to confirm brain death prior to skinning an animal.

Documentary evidence – in the form of two veterinary reports following the 2001 seal hunt, and video footage of the seal hunt obtained by IFAW in recent years – does not support claims by the Canadian government that the hunt is “humane” or “well regulated.”

All available evidence suggests that each year, tens of thousands of seal pups die in an unacceptably cruel manner that is inconsistent with contemporary animal welfare standards.

As one of the veterinary reports concluded: Canada's commercial seal hunt results in “considerable and unacceptable suffering.”

“Throughout my career as a veterinarian, I have seen animals die in slaughterhouses, research labs, and animal shelters, and I can assure you that the cruelty existing in the seal hunt would not be tolerated in these institutions.”

Dr. Mary Richardson DVM, Animal Care Review Board,
Solicitor-General of Ontario, after observing 1995 hunt

"Struck and Lost"

This is the name scientists give to seals that are wounded by a sealer's blow, but either escape or sink before the sealer reaches them.

After being shot or struck by a hakapik, these wounded animals experience varying degrees of pain and suffering and many – if not most – will eventually die from their injuries. The seal pictured at right was found during the 2005 hunt; it had died in the water while surfacing for air.

Each year, the Canadian government estimates that an average of 26,000 seals suffer and die in this way as a result of the Canadian commercial seal hunt.

In addition to suffering long and painful deaths, these seals are not recorded in the official catch statistics.



Over the course of the 2003-2005 seal management plan, over 78,000 seals, including this one, were "struck and lost".



Members of an international veterinary team examine seal carcasses during the 2001 hunt.

What do veterinarians say?

Every veterinary report on the seal hunt done in the past five years documents the ongoing, unacceptable cruelty involved in this hunt.

Burdon *et al.* (2001)¹

- "There is undoubtedly an obvious need to reduce suffering and improve the welfare of these animals by alterations in the existing regulations and increasing their enforcement." p.1.
- "... the present seal hunt fails to comply with basic animal welfare regulations." p.2.
- "We conclude that the hunt is resulting in considerable and unacceptable suffering." p.1.

Daoust *et al.* (2002)²

- "A large proportion (87%) of the sealers ... failed to [check for death] before proceeding to hook or bleed the seal, or go to another seal." p. 691.
- Agreed with Burdon *et al.* that a number of seals were conscious after being shot, and that live seals were hooked with a boat hook or gaff and dragged across the ice while still conscious.
- Agreed with Burdon *et al.* that 24% of seals observed on videotape were not killed humanely, nor in a manner consistent with Canada's Marine Mammal Regulations.
- Concluded that the "proportion of animals that are not killed efficiently justifies continued attention to this industry's activities..." p. 693.

Independent Veterinary Working Group* (2005)³

- "The competitive nature of the hunt ... creates an environment in which speed is the rule, and hunters may be encouraged to take shortcuts." p.11.
- "DFO appears to lack sufficient dedicated capacity to monitor and enforce regulation of the hunt, especially at the Front." p.14.
- Put forth eleven recommendations needed for the hunt to become humane.

* Funded by World Wildlife Fund, NL.

2. Canada's seal hunt is not biologically sustainable ...

For 2006, the Canadian government has announced a total allowable catch (TAC) of 335,000 (including a 10,000 allocation for personal use, Arctic hunts, and new aboriginal initiatives). At the time of printing, however, the new 5 year management plan was not yet available.

The most recent management plan⁴, for the period of 2003-2005, provided for a total allowable catch of 975,000 seals over a three-year period. This quota was intended to reduce the seal herd by some 600,000 animals by 2006. In fact the quota was exceeded, and over 985,000 seals were killed during this period.

In recent years, any pretense of a scientifically based, biologically sustainable hunt has been abandoned and Canada's commercial seal hunt has become a cull designed to reduce the size of the population.

... and puts the seal herd at risk of depletion.

Canada's risky, politically-driven approach to natural resources management has become a major conservation concern, particularly among scientists and conservation biologists. It resulted in the devastating collapse of cod and other fish stocks off Canada's East coast in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The same approach is now being applied to the management of Canada's commercial seal hunt.

Although it claims to be "precautionary," the Canadian government's management plan does not satisfy modern conservation standards of precaution.

In fact, a recent analysis⁵ of the Canadian government's management approach found that it risks depleting the seal population by more than 70% within the next 15 years.

The authors of the study discovered that the government's approach is likely to maintain a high TAC despite a declining population, and noted that the



A young ragged jacket left behind.

The current management strategy is likely to maintain a high TAC even for a declining seal population. The likelihood that the population will be depleted by more than 50-70% is alarmingly high.

evidence that the TAC should be reduced is unlikely to be detected until the seal population has been reduced to a very low level. It concluded that the likelihood that the harp seal population will be depleted more than 50 – 70% is “alarmingly high.”

Further, the report noted that when the TAC is finally reduced, the required change in catch limits will be drastic, difficult to implement, and politically unpopular. This is not good management, neither for conservation nor for the sealing industry.

In addition, climate change may be wreaking havoc with the seals' habitat. Harp seals depend on a stable ice platform to give birth and nurse their pups. But increasingly, poor ice conditions are resulting in higher than normal pup mortality. In 2002, 75% of the pups born in the Gulf of St. Lawrence were thought to have died as a result of poor ice conditions even before the hunt began.

Thanks to anti-sealing groups' efforts to reduce the numbers of seals killed in the 1980s, the recovery of the harp seal herd is a "conservation success story," as Federal Fisheries Minister Loyola Hearn recently pointed out.

But we know that even a relatively large population of a species is no protection against bad management policies and overexploitation.

The passenger pigeon, thought to have once been the most abundant bird on the face of the earth, was exterminated in less than a century. And Atlantic cod – once so numerous they could reportedly be scooped from the sea in baskets – have been depleted by 99% and are now on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

The history of wildlife conservation has shown that the commercial trade in wildlife, or its parts and derivatives, is rarely sustainable. Long lived and slowly reproducing animals that migrate across international borders – such as harp seals – are particularly at risk from commercial exploitation.

A responsible government would heed experts' calls for caution now, so that we are not forced to take drastic actions later – when those decisions will be more difficult and costly to implement, and might come too late to be effective.

What would the United States do?

The United States prohibits the commercial hunting of marine mammals. However, they use a precautionary approach to ensure that marine mammal populations are not put at risk by human activities. Called "Potential Biological Removals," or PBR, this is a precautionary management approach that estimates the number of seals or whales that can be killed or "removed" from a population as a result of human activities, without threatening that population.

If we apply this approach to the Northwest Atlantic harp seal herd, the estimate of total removals by Canada that would be acceptable is between 81,000 and 175,000 animals each year. This would amount to a quota or total allowable catch for the Canadian harp seal hunt between 75,128 and 162,313.

The total allowable catch for 2006 is therefore more than *two* to *four* times what would be allowed under the rigorously tested, and widely accepted "precautionary" approach used in the United States.



3. There is no scientific reason to cull harp seals.

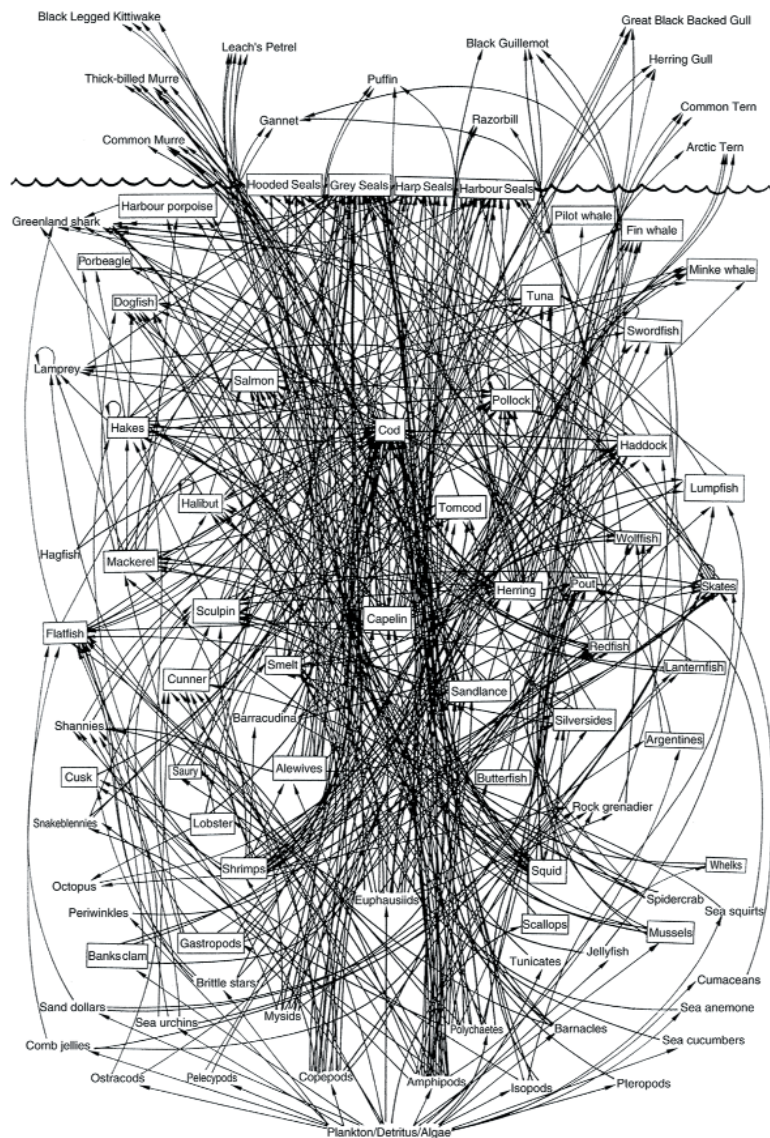
There is no scientific evidence that culling harp seals will benefit commercial fisheries in Atlantic Canada. When the Atlantic cod stocks collapsed in the early 1990s, it was popular to blame seals for “eating all the fish.” Today, scientists – and even most fishermen – agree that seals did not cause the collapse of cod stocks. Quite simply, the cause was overfishing and failures in fisheries management.

Harp seals eat a wide variety of fish and marine invertebrates, but most of them have no commercial value. There is no scientific evidence that culling harp seals will benefit any fish stock or commercial fishery, and culling harp seals will almost certainly not produce any detectable improvement in cod stocks.

Interactions between competitors, predators, and prey in the Northwest Atlantic ecosystem are sufficiently complex – as in the simplified diagram shown here – that many scientists now think a reduction in the size of the harp seal population might actually be detrimental to the recovery of depleted cod stocks.

In fact, a recent paper co-authored by two DFO scientists modeled the trophic levels in the northern Gulf of St. Lawrence.⁶ They found that predation on cod by harp seals accounted for a mere 1% of large cod mortality. Fishing, on the other hand, accounted for 46% of large cod mortality. The most significant predator of small cod was large cod and other large fish (65%) – not seals.

The paper concluded that seals play an important role in maintaining the structure of the ecosystem, and that in the Gulf of St. Lawrence ecosystem, “...marine mammals, when analyzed in a food web context, had a beneficial predation effect... This beneficial effect is even greater than the predation itself, leading to an overall positive impact of the predator on the system.”



A simplified food web for the Northwest Atlantic.

There is no scientific evidence that culling harp seals will produce measurable benefits for any fish stock or commercial fishery.

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

There is little economic justification for Canada's commercial seal hunt. In the late 1990s, an estimated \$20 million in subsidies was pumped into the seal hunt by the Canadian federal government and the provincial government of Newfoundland and Labrador. This caused the numbers of harp seals killed to skyrocket to levels not seen in the previous 30 years. While neither government currently subsidizes the hunt through meat subsidies or other direct payments to sealers, significant amounts of Canadian taxpayer dollars continue to be spent. These subsidies include:

- funding research into the development of new seal products
- attempting to develop new markets for seal products
- construction and upgrading of seal processing plants
- icebreaking services to lead sealers to the greatest concentration of seals
- government promotion of the seal hunt in Europe and elsewhere

In addition, the government of Newfoundland and Labrador is currently 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.

In spite of these continuing subsidies, the government claims that Canada's commercial seal hunt is market-driven and economically viable. The fact is, sealing is a very small enterprise, accounting for about one-half of one-percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

If anyone were to do proper accounting – including the costs of management and research, the governments' costs to promote the hunt, the potential impact of boycotts on seafood and tourism, the cost to Canada's reputation abroad, etc. – they would likely find that the hunt actually *costs* Canada money.

Despite putting years of research, and hundreds of thousands of dollars, into developing new products, by far the most economically valuable part of the seal is its pelt* – a non-essential product for the fashion industry. Most of the harp seal carcasses (including the meat) are left on the ice to rot.

* In 2005, seal pelts accounted for over 98% of the landed value of all seal products.

A Canadian Coast Guard icebreaker (below) leads sealers to the herd during the 2005 Gulf hunt.



Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency			Agence de promotion économique du Canada atlantique			Canada Site		
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Sources of Financing	ACO Direct	Media Room						

COA'S PROJECT INFORMATION SITE			
Client Name / Project Description	Total Government Funding	Public Access Date	
Grey Seal Research and Development Society Commercial seal marketing product development and research	\$132,000	2005-09-	
North Atlantic Biopharma Inc. Develop a seal oil pharmaceutical product	\$266,350	20	Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador study the effects of feeding seal oil to laying hens
Indian Bay Processors Inc. Establish a facility to process seal meat	\$134,000	20	Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador provide evidence of health benefits of seal
Atlantic Marine Products Inc. establish a seal processing facility	\$401,240	19	Caboto Seafoods Limited marketing development of fully utilized seal products
Atlantic Marine Products Inc. explore export opportunities for dressed seal skins	\$65,417	20	Carino Company Limited expand an existing seal processing facility
Seal Industry Development Council continue to maximize the potential of the seal industry	\$189,000	20	Carino Company Limited conduct a pilot project on value added seal skin processing
Seal Industry Development Council establish a development association for the sealing industry	\$136,500	19	Carino Company Limited study changing seal oil refinery for food processing
Seal Industry Development Council carry out promotional activities for seal (fur/leather)	\$41,865	19	Gateway Maritime Inc. & Canomega Industries Inc. research and develop seal oil products
			\$25,600 2001-01-28
			\$64,888 2000-11-18
			\$39,258 2001-01-22
			\$180,000 1997-07-22
			\$57,245 2000-10-21
			\$4,704 2001-02-17
			\$144,842 1999-04-09

5. The commercial seal hunt runs against public opinion in Canada ...

A 2005 poll conducted by Environics Research for the International Fund for Animal Welfare⁷ found that 69% of Canadians were opposed to the commercial hunting of seals.

78% percent of respondents felt that the clubbing of seal pups was inherently cruel, and 77% said they would favour regulations banning the hunting of seals less than three months of age.

66% of respondents felt that the commercial seal hunt damaged Canada's international reputation.

A mere 4% of Canadians said that they would be very upset if the commercial hunt were ended.

5. Carino Co. of South D'ldo: \$71,556 to carry out a pilot project on value added seal skin processing. The project entails acquiring equipment and a master shaver from Norway.

14. Memorial University of Newfoundland: \$81,110 to conduct scientific research into the health related benefits of seal oil, particularly as related to inflammatory diseases and seal oil effects. This particular study will evaluate the level of seal related discomfort in animals.

Atlantic Marine Products Incorporated of Catalina has received \$81,771 to expand into non-traditional markets for seal skin products. The marketing program will include participation in various fur exhibitions, development of promotional material and advertising in selected publications.

The use of Canadian taxpayer dollars to support this hunt continues, despite the fact that recent polls show an overwhelming opposition (78%) to government subsidization of Canada's commercial seal hunt.

Which poll do you believe?

The complete question asked in the Environics Research poll commissioned by IFAW is:

"...In fact, a commercial seal hunt in Canada which has killed about 975,000 seals over the last 3 years still takes place. Now do you support or oppose the commercial hunting of seals off Canada's Atlantic coast?"

When posed this question, 69% of respondents opposed the commercial hunting of seals.

DFO claims that a majority of Canadians (60%) support the seal hunt. The question asked to achieve this figure was whether respondents supported a seal hunt policy where "...the hunt is done in a humane manner and quotas are set to ensure that seal populations are sustained."⁸

However, it is clear that the current seal hunt is NOT conducted in a humane manner, and the most recent quota was NOT sustainable. Even a veterinary report frequently cited in DFO's own documents could conclude only that "the Canadian harp seal hunt has the *potential* to be a humane hunt." (IVWG, p.5) Thus the DFO polling question refers to a theoretical situation which is not reflective of the current hunt.

Even DFO's review of its own poll admits that,

"public opinion was divided on the issues of commercial seal hunting, even if carried out in a humane manner... strong opponents clearly outweighed strong approvers... this indicates that arguments read to respondents were not convincing enough to make seal hunting policy a low risk public opinion issue."

... and international opposition to Canada's seal hunt is growing.

All around the world, governments are expressing their concerns about the Canadian seal hunt. Many are now acting to implement bans on the importation of seal products, not wanting to play a role in this cruel hunt.

- 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 the Canadian 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.
- 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 to stop the commercial hunt of seals and called on its Member States to introduce national bans on seal derived products.
- November 2003: The United States Senate introduced a resolution urging the government of Canada to end the needless slaughter of harp and hooded seals.
- October 1983: The European Community implemented a ban on seal products derived from white-coats (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.



The Facts about the Canadian Seal Hunt

This is a hunt for baby seals.

In recent years, at least 95% of the harp seals killed have been pups between the ages of about two weeks and three months.

The killing of whitecoat seals is prohibited, and so is the sale of their pelts. However, it is legal to kill harp seal pups once they have begun to moult their white pelts, as young as about 12 days of age. In 2005, 98% of the seals killed were pups between 2 weeks and 3 months of age. These seals have not eaten their first solid food, and many have not yet attempted to swim at the time they are slaughtered. Since harp seals may live up to 30 years of age, and are not sexually mature until 5-6 years, these animals can not be considered anything but ‘babies’.

Yes, seals are still clubbed.

Early in the season, younger seals are usually killed on the ice with clubs or hakapiks. Later in the season, beaters and older seals are usually shot with a rifle, both on the ice and in the water. It is also legal to use a shotgun firing slugs. The majority of seals taken in the Gulf of St. Lawrence hunt are normally killed with a hakapik.



The hakapik, a legal weapon for killing seals.

The seal hunt is NOT “just like any other animal industry.”

Unlike abattoirs, the seal hunt takes place over a vast area under unpredictable and unmanageable conditions. It is precisely those conditions – seals and sealers on slippery

and shifting ice, seals in the water, sealers shooting from boats bobbing up and down in the water, etc. – that have led some experts to conclude that this hunt can never satisfy the requirements of a humane hunt.

Only the pelts are valuable.

The commercial seal hunt is not a “full utilization” hunt. While some meat is used for local consumption, the vast majority of seal carcasses are left on the ice to rot. This wastefulness would not be tolerated in any other hunt. In 2005, pelts accounted for 98.4% of the landed value of all seal parts in Newfoundland. Even the landed value of seal penises exceeded the landed value of seal meat, not including flippers.



Seal carcasses abandoned on the ice, 2005.

Sealing does not generate employment for a large number of individuals.

The Canadian government claims that sealing provides valuable income to about 15,000 sealers and their families in Eastern Canada.⁹ The same source cites the landed value of the seal hunt in this region for 2005 as \$15,710,145. If these government figures are to be believed, this would amount to an income of about \$1047 per sealer, before deductions for the boat captain, for food, and for fuel.

It is important to remember that the seal hunt takes place over a very short period of time, in some years as few as two days. No one makes their living from sealing.

Many more seals are killed than are actually reported.

Although the 2003-2005 seal management plan allowed a quota of 975,000 seals to be killed, many more seals actually died as a result of hunting. When we account for the government's estimates of "struck and lost" (seals which are killed but never recovered nor recorded in the landed catch), 1,059,564 seals likely died as a result of the Canadian hunt.

A highly unregulated and subsidized seal hunt during the summer off the coast of Greenland is thought to kill an additional 135,000 seals each year from the same herd. When the Canadian Arctic hunts and seals killed as fisheries bycatch are included, an estimated 1.5 million harp seals were killed in the Northwest Atlantic over the past 3 years.

Tradition does not justify or excuse cruelty.

"...it is cruel, you can't get away from that ... but it's something we've done for 500 years..."

Jack Troake, Sealer, Twillingate, N.L.

The mass commercial killing of seals for the fur industry is not a "tradition" – in fact seals were originally hunted for their oil, and it was not until the 1940s and 1950s that seal pelts became part of the fur industry. It is quite likely that without the massive subsidization of this hunt by the Canadian and Newfoundland governments in the late 1990s, commercial sealing would not have been revitalized to the extent that it has over the past 10 years.

There are many "traditions" and niche-market industries whose time has passed, either because the end product is

Is the commercial harp seal hunt important to aboriginal peoples in Canada?

When we talk about Canada's commercial seal hunt, we are not talking about traditional subsistence hunts by First Nations and Inuit peoples, which occur in other places, at other times of the year, and largely target a different species of seal altogether. According to Canadian government documents, no commercial sealing licenses are held by residents of Nunavut.

Most seal hunting by First Nations and Inuit peoples occurs before and after Canada's commercial seal hunt. A small number of harp seals are taken by First Nations peoples during the southern and northern migrations of harp seals along the Labrador coast, in the autumn and spring, respectively. Similarly, the Inuit hunt small numbers of harp seals during the summer months in the eastern Canadian Arctic. However, they are primarily interested in "the seal," which for them is the small Arctic ringed seal (*Pusa hispida*).

For the record, IFAW does not oppose the hunting of wild animals (including seals) by First Nations or Inuit peoples for subsistence purposes, provided that such hunting is conducted on a sustainable basis, and that reasonable precautions are taken to minimize unnecessary pain and suffering of the animals affected.

no longer required or because of changing societal norms. Commercial whaling, commercial eggging of seabirds, and killing entire herds of muskox so their young could be sold to European zoos were all once North American "traditions" that resulted in the devastation of wildlife. Their time has deservedly passed – it is time for Canada's commercial seal hunt to join this list.

The price of cruelty.

Ragged jacket pelt \$13		Adult penis \$15	
Beater pelt \$22 - \$55		Seal oil \$0.20 / kg	
Adult pelt \$7		Seal meat \$0.27 / kg	

Average values in 2005. All values in \$CDN.
Source: Fisheries and Oceans Canada; Carino Company Ltd.

You don't need to support "animal rights" to know that this seal hunt is wrong.

Some who defend the seal hunt say that those who oppose it are against the use of animals for any purpose, and that an end to the seal hunt is the first step in an animal rights 'agenda'. Such absolutist arguments are used to create fear and obscure the true issue at hand. As author Matthew Scully points out, people should be able to decide that some practices with animals are too extreme to justify, then reasonably draw their own lines from there. Making a decision this way, says Scully, "shows that you are morally alert".

IFAW's Fight to End Canada's Commercial Seal Hunt

IFAW was established in 1969 with the explicit goal of ending the commercial seal hunt in Atlantic Canada. At the time, there was widespread scientific concern over the declining harp seal population.

Prior to 1971, the seal hunt off eastern Canada was largely unregulated. Annual catches of harp seals often surpassed 300,000 animals. Typically, more than 80% of the catch was made up of whitecoated pups. By 1971, scientists estimated that the harp seal population had declined by as much as two-thirds, and quota management was finally introduced to limit the number of animals killed. By that time, images of nursing whitecoats being skinned in front of their mothers had permeated the public consciousness, and the outcry about the inherent cruelty associated with the hunt was growing.

IFAW's most significant achievement for the protection of harp seals occurred in 1983 when the European Community imposed a temporary ban on the importation of pelts from whitecoated harp seal pups and blueback hooded seal pups. The ban was renewed in 1985 and made indefinite in 1989.

The European import ban, combined with a reduced demand for seal products worldwide, resulted in a marked decline in the numbers of seals killed over the next 15 years (see figure at right). Over this period, landed catches of harp seals averaged about 60,000 animals per year and the depleted population had an opportunity to recover.

Then in 1995, Brian Tobin, the Liberal Canadian fisheries minister at the time, increased the quota for harp seals, claiming that they were impeding the recovery of depleted cod stocks. Lacking scientific evidence to support this claim, he also announced a new subsidy program to encourage sealers to kill more seals. The provincial government of Newfoundland and Labrador also began to offer new subsidies for landed seal meat. In 1996, the meat subsidies *alone* amounted to \$2.5 million. From 1995-2001, over \$20 million in subsidies was pumped into the seal hunt, giving new momentum to the hunt. Without this direct government intervention, the commercial seal hunt would not have been revived to the extent that it has.

By 1996, the annual catches of harp seals began to increase dramatically. Since then, the quota has been increased twice. It was first raised in 1996 to 275,000 harp seals per year.



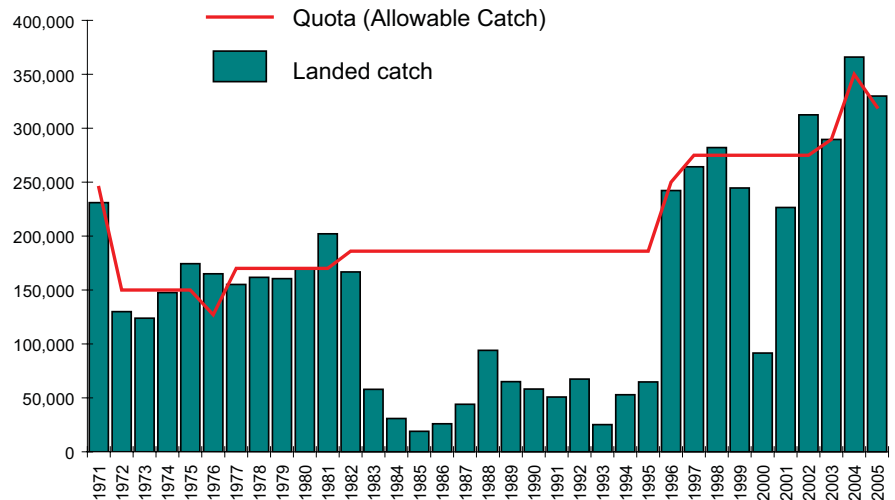
Then, in 2003, a three-year quota of 975,000 harp seals was announced. According to the government's 2003-2005 Management Plan, the hunt was not to exceed 350,000 in any two of the three years, leaving 275,000 for the third year.

In actuality, 289,512 harp seals were landed in 2003, 365,971 in 2004, and 389,512 in 2005.

In effect, the quota has been exceeded in the past three out of four years.

IFAW continues to travel to the Gulf of St. Lawrence each spring to bear witness to the commercial seal hunt and document the ongoing cruelty that occurs.

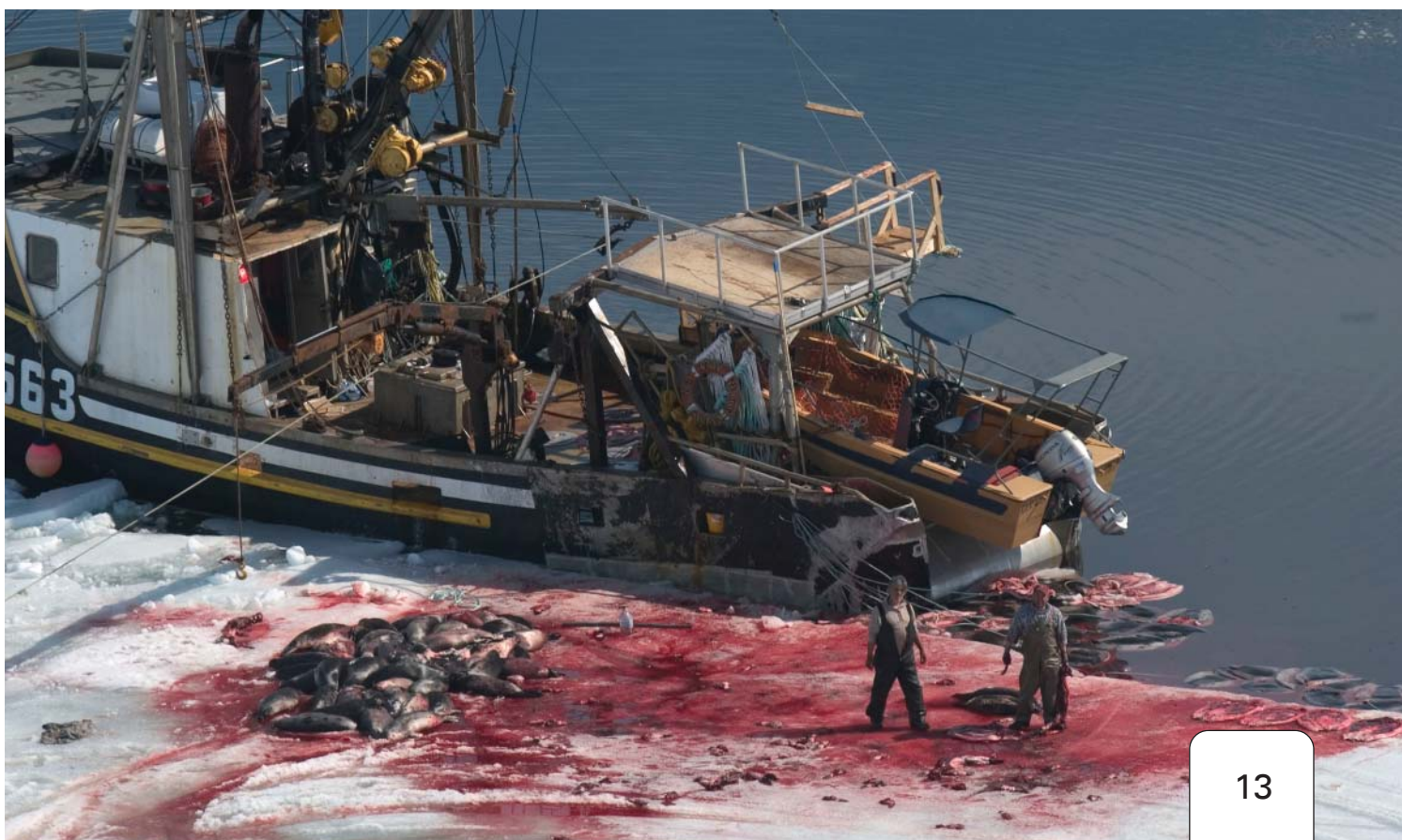
Observing the seal hunt is a lawful activity, done under permit from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. It requires a background check, an interview process, and significant paperwork in order to exercise our legal right to be on the ice. Although members of our team have received death threats, been physically assaulted with boat hooks and clubs, charged at by sealers on snowmobiles, knocked over on the ice, and had our



The landed catches of harp seals today has reached levels that caused the population to decline by as much as two-thirds between 1950 and 1970.

equipment damaged, we believe it is important for Canadians, and the world, to understand the reality of the commercial seal hunt.

To learn more about IFAW's campaign to end the Canadian commercial seal hunt, and for information on other IFAW campaigns and projects to help animals around the world, please visit us at www.ifaw.org.



Appendix 1.

Harp seals

The harp seal is one of the best known of all the seals. Its scientific name, *Pagophilus groenlandicus*, means “ice lover from Greenland.” Harp seals are widely distributed, inhabiting the North Atlantic and Arctic Oceans from Newfoundland and the Gulf of St. Lawrence (Canada) in the West to northern Russia in the East (see map below). The harp seal is a highly gregarious and migratory species that lives in close association with pack ice. Its annual range is essentially defined by the northern and southern limits of pack ice, in summer and winter, respectively.

There are three distinct populations, based on small physical, genetic, and behavioural differences. In addition to the Northwest Atlantic population – the one hunted off eastern Canada in the spring and West Greenland in the summer – there is a second population that lives off the East coast of Greenland and breeds on

Harp Seal (*Pagophilus groenlandicus*)



An adult harp seal with her whitecoat pup.

Adult weight	.....130 kg (290 lbs)
Adult length	.....1.7 m (5.5 ft)
Age at sexual maturity	.....5-6 years
Age at first reproduction	.....about 6-7 years
Life span (max.)	.....about 30 years
Number of pups per year	.....1
Pup birth weight	.....11 kg (24 lbs)
Duration of nursing	.....about 12 days
Growth rate of pup per day	.....2.2 kg (5 lbs)
Weaning weight	.....36 kg (80 lbs)



sea ice near the island of Jan Mayen. The third population lives mainly in the Barents Sea and reproduces in the White Sea off the coast of Russia.

The Canadian government estimated the Northwest Atlantic harp seal population to be 5.82 million in 2005 (95% Confidence Interval = 4.1-7.6 million). Pup production is estimated at 991,400. Government scientists say the harp seal population is *not* increasing, but it is stable. The impacts of the large pup hunts in the late 1990s are beginning to be seen as these year classes reach breeding age, and any increase in pup production appears to have stopped.

The most recent assessment for the Jan Mayen population estimated the pup production to be 70,000, and the estimate of seals one year of age or older was 350,000.

Aerial surveys conducted in the White Sea in 2003 found pup production to be on the order of 330,000, with the 1+ population size ranging from 1.6 to 2.1 million animals.

Appendix 2.

Hooded seals

The hooded seal, *Cystophora cristata*, breeds on the ice along with harp seals and is also hunted in Canada's commercial seal hunt. The hooded seal is a large, silver-gray seal with a black face and irregular black spots covering most of its body. Its common name refers to the inflatable bladder located on top of the nose and forehead of adult males. When relaxed, this bladder forms a loose, wrinkled sac that hangs over the front of the nose. When inflated, it becomes a large "hood" that covers the face and top of the head. Males can also inflate their elastic nasal septums through one of their nostrils to form a large pink balloon. These structures are secondary sexual characteristics that males use to display to other seals during the breeding season.

The hooded seals' range overlaps with that of the harp seal throughout much of the North Atlantic (see map below). Like harp seals, hooded seals are migratory, their annual movements closely following the drifting pack ice. In Canadian waters, they give birth to their pups and mate in the same areas as harp seals, but a little later in the season, in the second half of March.



Hooded Seal (*Cystophora cristata*)



An adult hooded seal with her blueback pup.

Adult weight	
male	.300 kg (661 lbs)
female	.200 kg (441 lbs)
Adult length	
male	.2.5 m (8.2 ft)
female	.2.2 m (7.2 ft)
Age at sexual maturity	3-4 years
Life span (max.)	about 30 years
Number of pups per year	.1
Pup birth weight	.25 kg (55 lbs)
Duration of nursing	.4 days
Growth rate of pup per day	.7 kg (15 lbs)
Weaning weight	.55 kg (121 lbs)

Compared to harp seals, hooded seal pups are born at an advanced developmental stage, having already shed their first coats of hair in the mother's womb. At birth, the pups are at an equivalent stage of development to the harp seal beater. Hooded seal pups are called bluebacks, named for the colour of their pelts, which are blue-black on the back and silver-gray on the belly.

Hooded seals are more solitary than harp seals, making both surveying and hunting this species a greater challenge. There are no reliable estimates of the current size of the hooded seal population in the Northwest Atlantic, and the population is described by scientists as "data poor." The results of a 2005 population survey were not available at the time of printing.

The current total allowable catch for the Canadian hooded seal hunt remains at 10,000 animals, but only a few hundred have been killed in recent years. It is illegal in Canada to kill bluebacks or to sell, barter or trade their pelts, although the Department of Fisheries is under considerable pressure from the sealing industry to have this regulation changed.

Appendix 3.

Landed and allowable catches of harp seals in Canada.

Year	Pups < 1 year	Seals > 1 year	Total	Quota	Year	Pups < 1 year	Seals > 1 year	Total	Quota
1952	198,063	109,045	307,108		1982	145,274	21,465	166,739	186,000
1953	197,975	74,911	272,886		1983	50,058	7,831	57,889	186,000
1954	175,034	89,382	264,416		1984	23,922	7,622	31,544	186,000
1955	252,297	81,072	333,369		1985	13,334	5,701	19,035	186,000
1956	341,397	48,013	389,410		1986	21,888	4,046	25,934	186,000
1957	165,438	80,042	245,480		1987	36,350	10,446	46,796	186,000
1958	140,996	156,790	297,786		1988	66,972	27,074	94,046	186,000
1959	238,832	81,302	320,134		1989	56,346	8,958	65,304	186,000
1960	156,168	121,182	277,350		1990	34,402	25,760	60,162	186,000
1961	168,819	19,047	187,866		1991	42,382	10,206	52,588	186,000
1962	207,088	112,901	319,989		1992	43,866	24,802	68,668	186,000
1963	270,419	71,623	342,042		1993	16,401	10,602	27,003	186,000
1964	266,382	75,281	341,663		1994	25,223	36,156	61,379	186,000
1965	182,758	51,495	234,253		1995	34,106	31,661	65,767	186,000
1966	251,135	72,004	323,139		1996	184,856	58,050	242,906	250,000
1967	277,750	56,606	334,356		1997	220,476	43,734	264,210	275,000
1968	156,458	36,238	192,696		1998	251,403	31,221	282,624	275,000
1969	233,340	55,472	288,812		1999	237,644	6,908	244,552	275,000
1970	217,431	40,064	257,495		2000	85,035	7,020	92,055	275,000
1971	210,579	20,387	230,966	245,000 *	2001	214,754	11,739	226,493	275,000
1972	116,810	13,073	129,883	150,000	2002	297,764	14,603	312,367	275,000
1973	98,335	25,497	123,832	150,000	2003	280,174	9,338	289,512	289,512 **
1974	114,825	32,810	147,635	150,000	2004	353,553	12,418	365,971	350,000
1975	140,638	33,725	174,363	150,000	2005	323,800	6,029	329,829	319,500
1976	132,085	32,917	165,002	127,000					
1977	126,982	28,161	155,143	170,000					
1978	116,190	45,533	161,723	170,000					
1979	132,458	28,083	160,541	170,000					
1980	132,421	37,105	169,526	170,000					
1981	178,394	23,775	202,169	170,000					

* Quota management was implemented in 1971.

** 2003 - 2005 quota was for 975,000 seals, with a maximum of 350,000 in 2 of the 3 years. 985,312 seals were landed over the 3 year period.

Modified from Stenson 2005.

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