

FACT SHEET ABOUT INTERNATIONAL SEALING

We hope this information helps you understand more about global seals and sealing activities. Please also visit www.sealsandsealing.net.

Heading 1: Sealing Around the World

Sealing is important to the people of coastal communities throughout the world. People in Australia, Canada, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Greenland, Iceland, Namibia, Norway, Russia, Sweden, United Kingdom and the United States all hunt seals.

Heading 2: Conservation

The World Conservation Union (IUCN), the largest and most respected conservation organization in the world, supports the sustainable use of seals and other wildlife, as long as this is from abundant populations.

North Atlantic Harp seal populations increased from 1.8 million in the 1980's to 5.4 to 5.8 million today – a three-fold increase.

Seal hunting is undertaken as a managed hunt or *cull* in many parts of the world. As such, regulations as to how seals can be hunted, who can hunt them, and how many are taken are applied. Each adult seal eats from 1 to 1.4 metric tonnes of fish, annually. Maintaining a healthy balance of the marine ecosystem is a challenge with increased seal populations and declining fish populations.

Without such sustainable harvest, animal herds are regulated by starvation and disease, which involves considerably more suffering than a well-controlled harvest.

Heading 3: Animal Welfare

Wherever animals are being hunted or killed, be it in an abattoir, on a farm or in the wild, the quickest and least painful mode of killing must always be used.

Sealers are trained to work rapidly using methods that are regulated by government authorities. The North Atlantic harp seal hunt, in Canada and Greenland, is the largest in the world, where over 90% of seals killed in Canada are done so by firearm.

Both the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association and the Independent Veterinary Working Group have recognized that the rifle and the hakapik (club) are both appropriate tools in the humane hunt of seals. In Canada, hunting regulations are enforced by Department of Fisheries and Oceans staff and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

“The large majority of seals that were studied in the Canadian hunt, 98%, were killed in a humane manner, which compares very favourably with results of surveys done in abattoirs in North America.” (2007)

Pierre-Yves Daoust, a member of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association, and frequent observer at the Canadian harp seal hunt since 1999.

Heading 4: People and Seals

Inuit:

Despite exemptions for Inuit-hunted seal pelts, Inuit and Greenlandic communities were hardest hit by the 1983 seal import ban imposed by the European Economic Community and the resulting global collapse in seal prices. Losing one of their only economic options, these communities suffered enormous socio-economic disintegration.

“The sealskin vest I am wearing is the result of Inuit carrying out their economy and livelihood. By doing this and doing it sustainably, we are setting a positive example to the world.” Sheila Watt-Cloutier, President, Inuit Circumpolar Conference, Canada, Aug 2002.

Coastal Fishermen:

Sealing by coastal fishermen has taken place for millennia, with commercial sealing by Europeans starting over 300 years ago. Today, all sealers are licensed and hunt from their own small fishing boats, as large vessels are prohibited for seal hunting.

People living in isolated villages with a limited range of employment options earn a significant portion of their income from the sealing industry, in some cases, up to 35%. Considered in context, sealing can make an enormous impact on a family’s well being: seals provide a livelihood, but they also provide meat for the kitchen table. In Newfoundland and Labrador, it is estimated that the edible portion of one Harp seal is worth an equivalent of \$150 of store-bought meat. In the arctic, where store bought food is very expensive, the value of the edible meat of a single ringed seal is well over \$200. (Dakins, 2007, Loring, 1993)

Heading 5: Products of the Seal harvest:

Approximately 15,000 people in the North Atlantic derive some income from sealing, in the way of meat, oils and pelts. Seal meat is very rich in protein, calcium, iron, magnesium, and vitamin B-12.

Omega-3 supplements are known to be helpful in preventing and treating diabetes, arthritis, epilepsy and cardiovascular disease - the leading cause of death in industrialized countries.

The skins of seals are extremely valuable for clothing. They are full of oil, increasing their water repellence, yet they are also porous, which allows body humidity to escape. These characteristics make seal skin very useful for winter coats, hats or boots.

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