

Anti-Sealing Groups: False Prophets of the “Green” Revolution

At Issue: Animal-rights extremists suggest that hunting seals is bad for the environment to gain public sympathy. What is their basis for fear mongering about the population status? While other marine stocks are under stress, anti-sealing campaigns omit facts about seal populations, and ignore the relationships between seals and the marine ecosystem. Consider these questions:

Hunt a Seal, Save a Seal? Sustainable Use WORKS!

- The Northwest Atlantic Harp Seal population is abundant and well conserved, numbering 9.5 million – the highest level ever estimated. The World Conservation Union (IUCN) lists it as a species of “least concern”.
- In Canada, seal hunting is an *instrument of conservation*. Federal Fisheries resource managers set the yearly allowable catches based on precautionary management principles in order to maintain an abundant population, which, in turn, marine harvesters can utilize.
- While hunting by European settlers is measured in hundreds of years, the duration of Inuit hunting in Canada’s North is measured in thousands: today, ringed seals remain an important resource for Inuit, while the population remains healthy.

What do leading conservation organizations say about seal hunting?

- In March of 2009, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) issued a public statement to condone Canada’s hunt for harp seals, and encourage further efforts for an eco-systems-based management approach, recognizing that “the harp seal population is at a near record high ... and current harvest practices pose no apparent threat to the long-term health of the species”.
- The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and IUCN recognize sustainable use to be a cornerstone of species conservation and ecosystem bio-diversity.

Is the size, “world’s largest”, a conservation concern?

- No, it is not. European grey-seal hunting in the Baltic Sea, Inuit ringed-seal harvests in Northern Canada, and the harp-seal quota hunt for Canada’s East Coast **ALL**

target the same percentage of population each year – approximately 5-6%. For sustainability, proportion is more relevant than size.

Conservation or CULL: Resource or PEST?

- Seal and other pinniped populations are often culled to reduce their numbers. This happens in the United Kingdom, United States, Australia, Sweden and Finland, where seals create conflicts with other marine harvesting activities. Even Canada is now considering such measures for grey seals, which are impacting habitats and fisheries.
- Harp seals are not necessarily safe from culling. Their yearly fish consumption in the Northwest Atlantic is at least 6 million metric tonnes. By comparison, Canada’s annual wild-caught fishery (all coasts), yields approximately 0.9 million metric tonnes. While Canada culls grey seals to protect fisheries, harp seals outnumber greys by 20 to 1, and are not culled. This further illustrates the value of sustainable-use incentives in harp seal conservation.

What about climate change?

- Consider a recent case in the US. An environmental group threatened to sue the Federal Government for not “listing” certain seal populations (spotted, ribbon) as “endangered due to climate change”. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration refused, citing both population abundance, and scientific observations indicating these animals have the ability to adapt to their changing environmental circumstances. Likewise, Canadian fisheries managers will not change policies based solely on speculation.

Bottom Line: Considering how far removed they are from true conservationism, anti-sealing campaigns are environmentally irresponsible. If consumers and governments want to keep enjoying products of the sea, then they must show respect for marine harvesters, and support sustainable resource harvesting.

For further information visit:
www.sealsandsealing.net

References available upon request.