

European Seal Products Ban: Against Welfare and Conservation

At Issue: Extremist groups say that all countries should follow the European Union, which recently imposed a ban on commercial seal product imports; they claim that anti-sealing campaigns have broad public support. However, by giving in to the demands of these groups, the EU has put itself in very difficult legal and ethical positions. Take note of the following outcomes:

EU legislators followed loud and angry campaigns, which said “commercial sealing” is “inhuman”...

- EU law now implies that sustainable wildlife harvesting is immoral. This position violates the principles of the Convention on Biological Diversity, World Conservation Union and the Brundtland Commission.

EU politicians believed a commercial product ban would “save” seals, but they accepted seal killing without end-use...

- EU law now recognizes that it is acceptable to kill seals to protect fishing interests (but it is unacceptable to derive commercial gain from the activity). The law allows marketing products if they derive solely from “marine management” activities, and are not for profit – this neither conserves seal populations, nor does it encourage good hunting practices.

EU spokespeople claimed their legislation protects the interests of Inuit and other indigenous peoples...

- Inuit interests insist that the exemption for products derived for “subsistence” or “traditional” purposes is only a political token and an insult. The so-called “trade” exemption does not acknowledge the right of Inuit to earn a living from selling their products. On April 29, 2009, the Arctic Council rejected the EU’s application to gain permanent-observer status, as one member said, because the EU lacks “the required sensitivity to acknowledge the [council and its membership]”.

EU politicians claimed a “Victory of People Power”: they claimed a majority of citizens wanted a ban...

- Electronic responses from “thousands of citizens”, generated by lobby efforts, were just one

manipulation of the media and the EU’s legislative process. Animal-rights extremist groups also have offices in the same buildings as European Parliamentarians.

EU Parliamentarians voted under duress...

- The May 5th vote on the legislation took place just weeks before Parliamentary elections last June. Interviewed following the vote, one Member of the European Parliament from Eastern France, Véronique Mathieu, claimed that the vote outcome would have been “completely different” if it had taken place after the elections: “We were preyed upon by certain NGOs, via both email and telephone. We were sometimes threatened in relation to our vote, even in the parliament; I have to say it, some people voted under pressure.”

Proponents of the ban spread rumours that the law would meet international trade obligations...

- Since the legislation has been ratified, the EU’s own legal opinions have revealed that the EU Commission and Council had neither a legal nor a constitutional basis for this law. Canada and Norway, in challenging the law under the World Trade Organization’s dispute settlement mechanism, have an excellent case against the European Union.

Bottom Line: European “Seal Saving” efforts **do not** set world-leading examples in animal-welfare practice, nor are they environmentally, legally or morally responsible – they are rooted public opinion manipulation and political opportunism, without real-world accountability. Their “victory” amounts to an EU-wide law that is hypocritical, anti-welfare and anti-conservation.

For further information visit:
www.sealsandsealing.net

References available upon request.