

Join the Growing Seafood Boycott Canada's Shameful Seal Hunt



Paul McCartney and seal pup. ©MARK GLOVER

The HSUS campaign to end the repugnant killing of baby seals on the ice off Newfoundland and in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence gathered critical momentum last year. We placed the Canadian government on clear notice that we will continue to increase the pressure until the savagery is permanently ended.

In March, Paul and Heather McCartney joined The HSUS's veteran anti-seal hunt campaigner Rebecca Aldworth to protest the pending massacre of some 354,000 infant harp and hooded seals. "Canada is known as a great nation ... but this is something that leaves a stain on the character of the Canadian people," Paul said. "We are absolutely committed to making sure this is the last slaughter of baby seals in Canada anyone will ever have to witness."

Unfortunately, his optimism was not borne out—at least for the 2007 hunt—but there were clear signs of mounting international opposition. Following the prohibition of seal product imports by Belgium, Croatia, Mexico, and Panama (the United States has long banned them), other nations including Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands were also moving to close their markets.



Canadian fur production. ©THE HSUS

In September, more than 400 members of the European Parliament signed a declaration calling on the 27-nation European Union (EU) to prohibit all trade in seal products, with Britain and Germany saying they will press the EU to adopt the ban. And there was further evidence that The HSUS-led campaign to end the hunt through a seafood consumer boycott was beginning to bite.

More than 2,000 U.S. restaurants, grocery chains, and seafood distributors and some 330,000 individuals have pledged to reduce or end their purchase of seafood from north of the border. The boycott is aimed squarely at the sealers. They are fishermen who earn, on average, less than five percent of their total income from killing seals and the rest from commercial fisheries such as snow crab and shrimp.

Canadian government trade statistics reveal that exports of snow crabs—the primary target of the embargo—have dropped by a staggering \$351 million CDN since we launched the seafood campaign in March 2005. This represents a 36-percent decline compared to pre-boycott levels. The annual value of the hunt, which is subsidized by the government, is less than \$20 million, earned from the sale of pelts and oil and of genitalia for the Asian aphrodisiac market.

Protesters have targeted the seal massacre for decades. Most of the killing takes place in the spring when hunters club or shoot hundreds of thousands of seal pups—numbers that are not sustainable. A 2001 veterinary study concluded that 42 percent of the carcasses examined were likely skinned while the animals were alive and conscious, marking the Canadian hunt as not only the largest slaughter of marine mammals in the world, but also the cruelest.