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# Canada's Commercial Seal Hunt

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# Canada's Commercial Seal Hunt

# 5

CHAPTER

*Rebecca Aldworth and Stephen Harris*

## Introduction

**L**ike efforts to end the commercial hunting of whales, the campaign to stop the slaughter of seals in Canada has become a major focus for animal and environment protection groups and governments the world over. For decades the face of the harp seal pup has been a symbol—to many, *the* symbol—of environment and animal advocacy.

But as much as the campaign to save the seals has become an icon for those who would protect wildlife, the campaign to continue the hunt has become a focus for those who would block the progress of the animal protection and environmental movements.

There is little middle ground between the two camps, with one calling for an immediate cessation of all commercial hunting of seals in Canada and the other lobbying for the highest seal hunt quotas in history. Canadian journalists often report with incredulity the vast gulf between the two sides of this debate. At the same time, those working to end the seal hunt note the campaign appears far harder to win than the economic and cultural importance of the industry would seem to warrant.

A review of the history of the seal campaign and the political environment in which it occurred can help account for some of these perceptions. It exposes the forces behind the rejuvenation of commercial sealing over the past decade and reveals that the price on the seals' heads is far greater than that which could ever be attached to their skins. Moreover, it explains why the success—or failure—of the campaign to save the seals may play a significant role in shaping society's view of the status of all animals.

## Early Seal Hunting in Canada

Commercial hunting of seals and other pinniped populations has taken place off Canada's east coast for hundreds of years. From its very beginnings, this commercial exploitation was conducted in an entirely unregulated and unsustainable fashion, leading to the extirpation and severe depletion of several populations (Mowat 1984).

The overhunting of pinnipeds did not occur in isolation; the marine environment of the northwestern Atlantic has been systematically devastated by relentless commer-

cial exploitation from the time of the first European settlers through today. In addition to pinnipeds, several species of whales, marine birds, and fish have also been driven to the brink of extinction through commercial slaughter over the past four centuries. Pilot whales, once the most common inshore whale species in Newfoundland, were killed en masse, in part to provide meat for mink and fox fur farms, until the population had become so depleted that hunters could no longer find enough to meet demand (Sanger, Dickinson, and Handcock 1998). The bowhead and right whales have become endangered species, the grey whale population of the North Atlantic no longer exists, and both the humpback and blue whale are now threatened species. Great auks, flightless aquatic birds once found throughout the North Atlantic, were hunted for their feathers, oil, and meat, and their populations began to decline rapidly in the late 1600s. Funk Island, off Newfoundland's east coast, and the Magdalen Islands in the Gulf of St. Lawrence were once home to large colonies, but Funk Island's last bird was killed between 1785 and 1800, and the species officially became

extinct in 1844 (Mersereau 2000). Industrial fishing has severely depleted numerous ground fish stocks, including northern cod, haddock, redfish, American plaice, and capelin.

Early European settlers' first foray into commercial hunting of pinnipeds off the east coast of Canada was with the walrus. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, walrus were slaughtered relentlessly for their lucrative oil, leather, and tusks. By 1680 all walrus had been removed from the St. Lawrence River; those along the north shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence were gone by 1704 (Lavigne and Kovacs 1988).

As the walrus disappeared, grey seals quickly became a substitute source for marine oil. For a time, grey seals became one of the most exploited resources in the New World. As with the walrus, they were slaughtered by the thousands, and by the 1860s grey seals had been wiped out of much of their former range (Ronald and Lavigne n.d.).

With walrus and grey seal populations in severe declines, it was inevitable that hunters would soon set their sights on the larger populations of ice-breeding harp and hooded seals. These seals spent only part of the year in Canadian waters, breeding on inaccessible sea ice, and it is likely they initially escaped the attention of early hunters. But by the early eighteenth century, both French and English settlers had begun to hunt harp and hooded seals commercially; by the end of the century, British settlers in Newfoundland were killing more than a hundred thousand seals in some years (Lavigne and Kovacs 1988).

Over the next hundred years, advances in technology and vessel construction dramatically increased the number of seals killed in the annual hunt. The year 1818 marks the beginning of the so-called Golden Age of Sealing, nearly half

a century of historic high levels of killing. Between 1818 and 1862, Newfoundlanders killed more than eighteen million seals.

Annual catches of harp seals remained strong until the 1860s, when they finally began to decline as the unsustainable levels of hunting took their toll on the population. Despite technological advances such as steam-driven vessels and the use of aircraft to spot seal herds, kill levels would never again be as consistently high. Nonetheless, sealers continued to slaughter hundreds of thousands of seals annually, and by the turn of the century, another 12.8 million seals had been killed. This brought the total seal kill for the century to a staggering 33 million animals, most of them newborn harp seals (Ronald and Lavigne n.d.).

With the dawn of the twentieth century came the advent of steel-hulled ships, and annual catches averaged more than 200,000 per year until 1914. But the new ships were called into service during both world wars, and kill levels during these years dropped dramatically (Canadian Geographic 2000). Hunt numbers began to increase again at the end of World War II, with higher oil prices and the introduction of motorized vessels. On average, more than 200,000 seals were killed annually through 1949. That year the sealing industry began to restructure. Newfoundland became a province of Canada, and with that came social benefits that made sealing less necessary for economic survival (Canadian Broadcasting Company [CBC] 1958). As sealing firms in Newfoundland withdrew from the seal hunt, companies based in Norway sent their boats to the ice instead. Despite the decrease in Newfoundland interest in the seal hunt, kill levels increased, achieving a 1950s average of 312,000 seals per year (Lavigne and Kovacs 1988).

Scientists soon grew concerned about the high levels of killing. In 1960 D. Sergeant warned,

Under these conditions, and without imposition of effective controls, the stock of western Atlantic harp seals must be considered to be in grave danger of catastrophic decline in numbers within a very few years. (In Lavigne and Kovacs 1988, 131)

Sergeant and Fisher (1960) noted that the census figures indicated the population had been reduced by at least 50 percent between 1950 and 1960.

## The Campaign to Save the Seals

*The question the seal hunt posed was not just how seals were killed, but whether they should be killed at all.*

—Brian Davies, founder,  
International Fund  
for Animal Welfare

As scientists grew increasingly concerned about unsustainable kill levels, Canadians were beginning to consider the animal welfare implications of the seal hunt. Humane societies first sent observers to the seal hunt during the 1950s, and reports of cruelty slowly filtered out to the public. In 1958 Albert Perlin, editor of Newfoundland's *Daily News*, was interviewed by CBC radio about the sealing industry. He commented,

The seal fishery was a wasteful industry. It was in many ways an unpleasant industry. I've heard many a sealer talk about the small whitecoats—two or three days old—almost looking up with tears in their eyes as they killed them...and frankly, if it's an industry we could do without, I'm not at all sure—from the standpoint of humanitarianism alone—it's probably a good industry to be without. (CBC 1958)

In 1964 the seal hunt achieved widespread notoriety, when a film including seal hunt footage was com-

missioned and broadcast by Radio Canada (the French component of the CBC). For the first time, the stark images of the bloodied newborn pups on the white ice floes and scenes of seals appearing to be skinned alive allowed Canadians to see what they had occasionally read about in newspapers. The images were disturbing, and public reaction was understandably strong.

In 1966 the New Brunswick Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals sent its officer, B. Davies, to observe the commercial seal hunt. Davies was profoundly moved by what he witnessed, and founded the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) just three years later, with the goal of ending Canada's commercial seal hunt (Lavigne and Kovacs 1988). Impressed by its ability to generate media coverage, Davies also sought to involve the newly formed organization Greenpeace in the campaign to save seals. Over the coming years, innovative media events on the ice organized by IFAW, Greenpeace, and others, and the support of celebrities such as Brigitte Bardot, made the plight of the seal pups in Canada an international lead story. As the public outcry against the seal hunt echoed around the world, it was clear the global effort to save the seals had begun in earnest.

The messaging of the animal welfare groups working to stop the seal hunt largely focused on the objections to beating newborn pups to death in front of their mothers, along with observer testimony and veterinary evidence indicating a significant percentage of the pups were being skinned alive in the process (Simpson 1967; Jordan 1978). Images of newborn seals staring up at club-wielding sealers shocked people around the world, and, as the campaign progressed, the debate was changing from how many seals should be killed in the hunt to whether it was morally acceptable to kill them at all.

As the cruelty debate raged on, government scientists were continuing to warn that the consistently high kill levels threatened the very survival of the seal populations. In 1971 a quota system was introduced in an attempt to conserve the rapidly dwindling seal stocks. However, the situation continued to worsen, and by 1975 a senior Canadian government scientist was so concerned about the impact of high levels of hunting that he suggested the harp seal population could be lost in the absence of a ten-year moratorium on commercial sealing (Lavigne and Kovacs 1988).

With Canada showing little will to even reduce quotas to a more sustainable level—much less end the hunt for humanitarian reasons—Davies and his colleagues realized public opposition would not be enough to stop the seal hunt. At the time, Europe was Canada's top sealskin market, importing fully three-quarters of the skins produced each year. Davies argued that Canada's commercial seal hunt was in reality Europe's responsibility, given that Europe was providing the economic incentive for the seal hunt to continue.

A tremendous lobby effort was waged by IFAW and European animal protection groups. An impressive five million signatures opposing the seal hunt were collected and submitted to the European Parliament and British government. By 1982 the public pressure was overwhelming, and the European Parliament voted to ban the import of skins from "whitecoats" (newborn harp seal pups under about two weeks of age) and "bluebacks" (hooded seal pups under about one year of age). The measure passed, 160 to 10, with 20 abstentions, and the issue then went to the European Commission for consideration. In October 1982 the commission recommended a temporary import ban based on a clause in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) per-

mitting trade restrictions to protect public morals. One month later the European Parliament effected a temporary ban to last until March 1983. Just before it expired, the European Economic Community (EEC), predecessor of the European Union, extended it for another six months. Talks on ending the ban took place among Canada, Norway, and the European Commission, but on October 1, 1983, the EEC implemented a two-year ban, then renewed it for another four years in 1985. Since Europe was the primary market for the Canadian sealing industry, kill levels in Canada declined dramatically (CBC 1982).

Still, Canada refused to prohibit a practice that was already ending through lack of markets. IFAW increased global pressure on the Canadian government and fishing industry by launching a boycott of Canadian seafood products in the United Kingdom in 1984. The boycott achieved significant corporate support, and the campaign convinced sealing groups to support a moratorium on the hunting of whitecoats. Still, the Canadian government refused to give in: it guaranteed to pay sealers 80 percent of the value of the seal pelts that year (CBC 1984).

Clearly, the offer of subsidies was not enough. In 1984 and 1985, because of the European ban on the import of whitecoat and blueback sealskins and the successful British boycott of Canadian fish, there was no large vessel-based commercial seal hunt (CBC 1987). Animal protection groups, confident the seafood boycott had achieved its goals, suspended the tactic, believing the seal hunt was winding down and would soon be over for good.

In December 1986 the Royal Commission on Seals and Sealing, a panel that had been set up by the federal government two years earlier, introduced a report in the House of Commons. Among other things, the report recommended

an end to hunting whitecoats. In 1987 large vessel owners prepared once again to hunt seals. Animal protection groups reacted quickly, threatening to move the seafood boycott into the United States, the top market for Canadian seafood. The Canadian government responded by banning the use of larger vessels and the killing of newborn pups at the seal hunt in Canadian waters, effectively ending the large-scale commercial seal hunt for several years (CBC 1987).

Arguably, this could have been the end of commercial sealing in Canada if not for two important factors—the collapse of the northern cod stock and the rise of the “wise use” movement, whose strategies were embraced by those promoting commercial exploitation of marine mammals.

## The Rise of the Wise Use Movement

*Our goal is to destroy, to eradicate the environmental movement.... We're mad as hell. We're not going to take it anymore. We're dead serious—we're going to destroy them. We want to be able to exploit the environment for private gain, absolutely.*

—Ron Arnold, executive vice president, Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise (Arnold 1995)

During the second half of the twentieth century, the environmental movement was fast changing from a fringe interest into a politically powerful entity. During this time leading environmental organizations such as Greenpeace were established, and, as public support for the movement grew, key environmental defense policies were successfully adopted. Three of the most important victories in the protection of marine mammals happened during this

time: the 1972 U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act, the 1982 moratorium on commercial whaling, and the 1983 EU ban on trade in products of whitecoat and blueback seal pups.

Even as the environmental movement was making headway, powerful opponents were surfacing in response. Those who stood to profit from resource exploitation struck back with an organized force that became known as the “wise use” movement. By creating industry front groups, using conservation language to describe resource extraction activities, advancing industry agendas through appropriation of native interests, and presenting environmentalists as self-interested profiteers, the wise use movement set out to regain ground.

In 1988 a conference was organized by the Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise (CDFE), led by an active opponent of the environmental movement, R. Arnold. The conference drew industry leaders from the United States and Canada, and the outcome was a “wise use agenda” signed by all participants. But while the objectives of the wise use agenda (including clear-cutting of old growth forests and weakening of endangered species legislation) were controversial, it was the strategies laid out by the “wise users” to achieve their goals that were the most troubling to environmental groups.

One of the key tactics promoted by the wise use movement to counter environmental campaigns was the creation of “front” groups—industry advocacy organizations positioned as public interest groups. Arnold advised,

The public is completely convinced that when you speak as an industry you are speaking out of nothing but self-interest... The pro-industry citizen activist group is the answer to these problems. It can be an

effective and convincing advocate for your industry. It can evoke powerful archetypes, such as the sanctity of the family, the virtue of the close-knit community, the natural wisdom of rural dwellers...and it can turn the public against your enemies....I think you'll find it one of your wisest investments over time. (Goldberg 2001, 15)

Soon, environmental and animal protection groups found themselves contending with industry-funded front groups in virtually every resource-extraction sector they attempted to influence. It was in this context that industry and government-funded sealing advocacy groups, including the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO), the World Council of Whalers (WCW), the High North Alliance (HNA), and the IWMC World Conservation Trust were established. Notably, the Canadian government counseled, participated in, and funded these organizations (Goldberg 2001).

NAMMCO was created in 1992 by four pro-whaling nations (the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland, and Norway) that were dissatisfied with the International Whaling Commission's (IWC) global moratorium on commercial whaling. NAMMCO positions itself as a science-based and responsible alternative to the IWC and a recognized international management body. However, its membership is restricted to whaling and sealing interests, and experts view it as an organization working to promote a wise use agenda (Goldberg 2001). In 1997 Canada played host to a NAMMCO meeting, “Sealing the Future.” The conference, which included representatives of the Canadian government, resulted in a press release demanding the elimination of “WTO incompatible seal product trade barriers” (North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission 1997, n.p).

While NAMMCO positions itself as an international management authority, other wise use groups define themselves as conservation bodies. On its website ([www.iwmc.org](http://www.iwmc.org)), the IWMC World Conservation Trust (formerly known as the International Wildlife Management Consortium, or IWMC) calls itself a "global coalition of experts and wildlife managers promoting the conservation of habitat and wildlife resources," and asks people to "donate now to protect the world's wildlife for future generations." In light of this, the public would perhaps be surprised to learn that IWMC's Canadian founder and president, E. Lapointe, is a paid lobbyist for countries seeking to reopen the trade in endangered species (Vidal 2004). Having previously worked with the Canadian government for fourteen years, Lapointe served as secretary general of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) between 1982 and 1990, a position from which he was dismissed under controversial circumstances when he campaigned against a ban on the ivory trade. He later received a settlement after the UN found that his dismissal was "arbitrary and capricious," and he now advises several nations, including Canada, on how to avoid animal trade legislation legally (Vidal 2004). Five of the nine officers in his organization are former CITES employees, and Lapointe states that his funding comes from Canada, China, Japan, Norway, and "two small European countries" (Russell 2002).

In addition to advocating trophy hunts for elephants, reopening the international ivory trade, and a return to commercial whaling, the IWMC strongly supports the Canadian seal hunt. In an open letter entitled "Seal War," which was posted on the IWMC website in 2005, Lapointe urged organizations to join a "Sustainable Use Coalition to support the Canadian Sealers and Fishermen and the

Canadian Government, in their struggle against the anti-sealing protest industry" (Lapointe 2005, n.p.). This, and the other seal content on the IWMC website, is a good example of wise use messaging, branding the campaign to defend the seal hunt as "sustainable use" and the campaign to end it as "eco-terror." The IWMC site defines groups working to end the seal hunt as "extreme," "radical," and "vicious," and the individuals who oppose the seal hunt as misinformed, wealthy urbanites with little understanding of, or concern for, rural lifestyles.

Another common wise use strategy emerged in the 1980s: the use of public sympathy for traditional, subsistence aboriginal lifestyles to defend commercial trade in wildlife parts. An employee of the Canadian Department of Indian and Northern Affairs and senior Canadian government advisor, B. Roberts, explained the tactic at a whaling conference in Iceland as he outlined successful strategies used to counter anti-sealing groups. He said,

The first step was to neutralize the appeal of the animal protection lobby. To accomplish this it was necessary to mount an equally emotionally powerful counter-appeal. This counter-appeal was based on the survival needs of aboriginal communities which depended upon the continued taking of fur-bearing animals. (Schmidt 1999, 7)

The Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise (2006), considered a leading wise use group, uses this tactic to support the seal hunt. The CDFE website includes a statement that, without providing any substantiating evidence, attempts to blame economic hardships and even suicide rates in native communities on the collapse of the commercial sealing industry in the 1980s:

The Canadian seal hunt was

decimated by outside intruders....As a result, the resource-extracting culture withered and its suicide rate skyrocketed as helpless people felt the unreasoning hatred of well-fed constituencies in the dominant urban culture. [http://www.eskimo.com/~rarnold/seal\\_hunt.htm](http://www.eskimo.com/~rarnold/seal_hunt.htm).

Notably, the commercial seal hunt in Canada is conducted almost entirely by non-aboriginal people from Canada's east coast, and the traditional value of sealing to native communities has been in subsistence hunts, which by definition are not affected by global seal product trade. According to P. Hollingsworth, an Ojibwa and founder of the Native Animal Brotherhood, it is resource extraction industries that are leading to the demise of native culture.

He noted,

Indigenous survival is not synonymous with Canada's fur trade. Quite the opposite is true. History has shown that the commercial fur trade industry actively promoted the disintegration of our culture, a process which continues to this day. (Global Action Network n.d).

Regardless, the perception that ending the commercial seal hunt would have a devastating impact on native communities prevails, and hardships faced by Canadian aboriginals remain one of the most compelling arguments in support of the hunt. As CDFE's founder Arnold stated in 1991, "Facts don't matter. In politics, perception is reality" (Krakauer 1991, 70).

While these and other wise use tactics helped seal hunt proponents lay the foundation for a return to industrial-scale commercial sealing, it was the cod collapse off the east coast of Canada in the 1990s that provided the political impetus for the Canadian government to act.

## The Collapse of Northern Cod

*The collapse of the cod stocks was due to over-fishing. It had nothing to do with the environment and nothing to do with seals.*

—Ransom Myers, former Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans scientist

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Canada's fishing industry developed new technologies. With huge nets, industrial fishing vessels could haul up as much as two hundred tons of fish in one hour, twice the amount a typical sixteenth-century boat would have caught in an entire season. Cod catches increased steadily over the 1950s and 1960s, from a yearly average of 250,000 tons to a peak of 800,000 tons in 1968 (Brubaker 2000).

At the time, foreign fishing fleets were taking the lion's share of the fish caught off the east coast of Canada. They took not only the cod, but the main food source for the cod, capelin, as well. It was no surprise that the northern cod stock was diminishing under the double threat of a decreasing food supply and overfishing (Tsoa 1996).

By 1977 the decrease in ground fish stocks had become so evident that Canada imposed a two hundred-mile limit off its coast as a means of stopping the foreign fishing fleets. Regrettably, instead of using the new protected zone to reduce fishing and allow fish stocks to rebuild, Canadian fishing companies saw a chance to increase their own take. In what many environmentalists see as a conservation betrayal, Canadian fishing fleets dramatically increased the size of their catches, and in Newfoundland the number of registered fishers increased by 41 percent (Blake n.d.). Fisheries biologist Richard Haedrich elaborated: "The idea was that the streets were paved with fish and that now that

the Europeans were gone it would come to the Canadians" (McKibben 1998, 64).

Throughout the next decade, the Canadian government paid little heed to the concerns of inshore fishermen who were noticing a serious decrease in their catches and the size of the individual northern cod. They continued to set unsustainable quotas until it was evident the northern cod population could withstand no more (Harris 1998). By the 1990s, with northern cod stocks at only 1 percent of their historic levels, it was clear decades of overfishing had resulted in an ecological catastrophe. In 1992 a moratorium was declared on cod fishing; unfortunately, by then, many believe it was already too late (Woodard 2001).

The public demanded to know how Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) scientists could have missed the obvious signs of a declining population, when inshore fishermen had been predicting the collapse for decades. As tens of thousands of Atlantic Canadians lost a primary source of income, the DFO offered up various explanations, from foreign fishing fleets to changing ocean temperatures. Despite a consensus among the scientific community to the contrary, seal predation was at the top of the DFO's list (Lavigne 1995).

Given the residual resentment surrounding the EU sealskin ban and the boycott of Canadian seafood, the failure of the cod stocks to recover, and the prevalent myth that seals harm fish stocks, seals were a perfect scapegoat for dwindling fish stocks. Government and independent scientists argued that only 3 percent of a harp seal's diet consists of northern cod, and that harp seals also consume many significant cod predators (Lavigne 1995). But their advice went unheard, and calls for a seal cull echoed loudly

through eastern Canada and within the DFO bureaucracy itself.

## A Lethal Combination

*Mr. Speaker, I would like to see the 6 million seals, or whatever number is out there, killed and sold, or destroyed and burned. I do not care what happens to them...the more they kill the better I will love it.*

—John Efford, Newfoundland Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture, 1998

When the 1992 cod moratorium was announced, optimistic politicians predicted it would be over within a few years. But informed scientists were already stating it would take at least a decade before the cod could be expected to recover (Myers, Mertz, and Fowlow 1997). As the years went by, it was clear the cod were not coming back, and the Canadian government began to look at ways to appease the east coast fishing industry.

In October 1995 B. Tobin, then Canadian fisheries minister, along with the fisheries ministers from Iceland, Norway, Russia, and the Faroe Islands and a representative from Greenland, signed a statement declaring seals "a conservation problem" in parts of the North Atlantic Ocean (Department of Fisheries and Oceans 1995, n.p.). The statement concluded, "there is a need to reduce the sizes of the seal herds...through expanded commercial harvests where possible." Only the EU dissented.

While informed cynics saw the move as an attempt to justify commercial sealing and placate fishermen in the wake of the cod collapse, Canadian media provided misleading legitimacy to the minister's statement. The Canadian press falsely stated that "federal research has linked seals to a decline in cod stocks" (Lavigne 1996a, 57). The Department of Fisheries and

Oceans' website homepage at the time stated, "Harp seals are one of the factors inhibiting groundfish recovery" (Lavigne 1995). In reality, the Canadian government's own scientists had repeatedly concluded the depletion of fish stocks had nothing to do with seals (House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans 1997). Regardless, a public relations foundation was clearly being laid for rejuvenation of the commercial seal hunt in Canada. It came as little surprise to animal protection groups when, in 1996, Tobin announced a massive federal subsidy for sealers (Lavigne 1996b). Hunt numbers exceeded 240,000 seals that year and have remained high ever since.

## The Politics of Conservation

The following year some clarity was finally provided on the seals and cod question when two former DFO scientists, including J. Hutchings, published "Is Scientific Inquiry Incompatible with Government Information Control?" (Hutchings, Walters, and Haedrich 1997). It indicated a tradition of suppression of scientific information at DFO and cited numerous examples of DFO scientists warning that ground fish stocks were in a dangerous decline; these findings were either ignored or suppressed as high quotas continued to be allocated. The authors suggested, "The conservation of natural resources is not facilitated by science integrated within a political body" (Goldberg 2001, 3).

According to the authors, government interference was not restricted to reports on fish stocks. Just as evidence suggesting a pending collapse of cod stocks was suppressed, so, too, was information that did not support the government agenda to scapegoat seals; the authors pointed out that statements in the original draft of the

1995 Stock Status Report on Gulf of St. Lawrence ground fish, indicating seal predation was unlikely to be responsible for cod mortality trends, were allegedly removed from the published version, contrary to scientific advice.

A hearing was convened in the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans to hear testimony regarding the report. Witnesses described an established pattern at DFO of intimidating researchers, repressing scientific uncertainty about stock levels, censoring or rewriting reports, failing to collect or use relevant data, hiding data from researchers, barring scientists from speaking to the media or to colleagues about their findings, threatening to withhold research funding to universities whose staff criticize DFO, and threatening to sue DFO critics (Goldberg 2001, 3).

R. Myers, a former DFO fisheries scientist, was called to testify. He described being tasked by the DFO bureaucracy to conduct research "examining the mortality of cod relating to seals to counter arguments by animal rights people that one could never detect such an event." Myers noted, "We found out we could not detect the effect of seals with the data we had. Because we did not show what was desired by Ottawa bureaucrats, that research was suppressed" (in House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans 1997, n.p.).

Though Myers and other witnesses provided suggestions for improvements to DFO, the hearing in the House Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans resulted in little concrete change at DFO (Goldberg 2001). A decade later bottom trawling and other destructive technologies were still established practices in Canada's fishing industry (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation News 2006b), and seals remained the focus of intensive studies that attempt to link

their populations to declining fish stocks (Department of Fisheries and Oceans 2004).

## Trading Quotas for Votes

In 1997, despite the information exposed in the House of Commons inquiry and media, the use of seals as a scapegoat for fisheries mismanagement continued. Newfoundland's fisheries minister, J. Efford, crisscrossed the nation to convince Canadians of the need for an expanded seal hunt. "The problem is that seals eat fish. They do not eat Kentucky Fried Chicken. I don't need to be a genius or a rocket scientist to figure that out," he informed audiences (Luksic 1998, n.p.).

It is perhaps ironic that Efford was blaming seals for the vanished cod just as the House of Commons inquiry was exposing what appeared to be a DFO agenda to scapegoat seals for the cod collapse. Around the same time, F. Mifflin, B. Tobin's successor as Canadian fisheries minister, was telling the public that the cod stocks were recovering. In a 1996 press release, Mifflin stated, "Declines in stocks have stopped...there are indications that some stocks are rebuilding" (Department of Fisheries and Oceans 1996, n.p.). In a controversial move, just ten days before the 1997 federal election was called, Mifflin announced that six thousand tons of cod could be taken from the northern Gulf of St. Lawrence and off the west coast of Newfoundland, and ten thousand tons could be taken from the southern Newfoundland coast (Department of Fisheries and Oceans 1997).

Meanwhile, attempts by the DFO to prove seal predation was leading to increased cod mortality were falling far short of their goals (House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans 1997). Nevertheless, a Par-



liamentary advisory group, the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council (FRCC), advised in a 1999 report that the seal herds be reduced by up to 50 percent of their current levels, stating, “action must be taken immediately to improve opportunities for the conservation and recovery of cod and other groundfish stocks, *without waiting for absolute scientific proof of the effects of seal predation*” [emphasis added] (Fisheries Resource Conservation Council 1999, 11).

By 2003 it was clear the controversial new cod fishing zones had to be closed permanently. The FRCC distributed a press release calling for the government to cull seals as a means to help cod stocks rebuild, and, in the run-up to another federal election, fisheries minister R. Thibault announced the highest quota for harp seals in history; Canada would allow nearly one million seal pups to be slaughtered over the next three years (Department of Fisheries and Oceans 2003).

## The Expanded Seal Hunt

*Last year in the seal management plan I used a flexible approach....I introduced a three-year management plan of 975,000 seals. It will mean a reduction for the first time in the herd.*

—R. Thibault, Canadian Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, 2003

With more than one million seals killed between 2003 and 2006, Canada’s commercial seal hunt has become by far the largest slaughter of marine mammals on Earth. The 2006 kill levels met and even exceeded those of the 1950s and 1960s, when scientists argued overhunting threatened the North-west Atlantic harp seal population. In *The Plundered Seas*, M. Berrill (1997, 120) stated,

Biologists overestimated size of stocks. Managers proposed quotas that did not allow for natural large declines in populations, and they consistently set quotas that were higher than what the biologists proposed. Fishermen lobbied hard for greater access....

Berrill was referring to the collapse of northern cod in the Newfoundland fishery, but the words could apply equally to seals today.

Scientists argue the current Canadian seal hunt management plan poses a renewed threat to the survival of seal populations, particularly in light of the pending effects of climate change on the habitats of these ice-dependent animals. They suggest that DFO’s population modeling may be overestimating harp seal numbers (Harris, Sousbury, and Iossa 2005) and note that Canada and Greenland both hunt the same population of harp seals but do not cooperate in setting quotas.

Perhaps these factors would be less alarming, were it not for the pending effects of climate change on harp and hooded seals and other ice associated animals. In a 2005 report, Johnston et al. (2005) concluded that reduced ice cover in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and off Newfoundland and Labrador during the breeding season may represent a serious environmental challenge for harp and hooded seals, which require an ice platform for whelping and nursing. The report noted that, in six of the previous seven years (1996–2002), ice cover on the east coast of Canada was significantly below the seasonal average for the period 1983–2002, and in poor ice years, ice cover in some regions was up to 60 percent less than the yearly average observed between 1969 and 2002 (Johnston et al. 2005). In 1981 and 2002, both poor ice years, Canadian government scientists estimated that three-quarters of the pups born in the Gulf of St. Lawrence died as a consequence

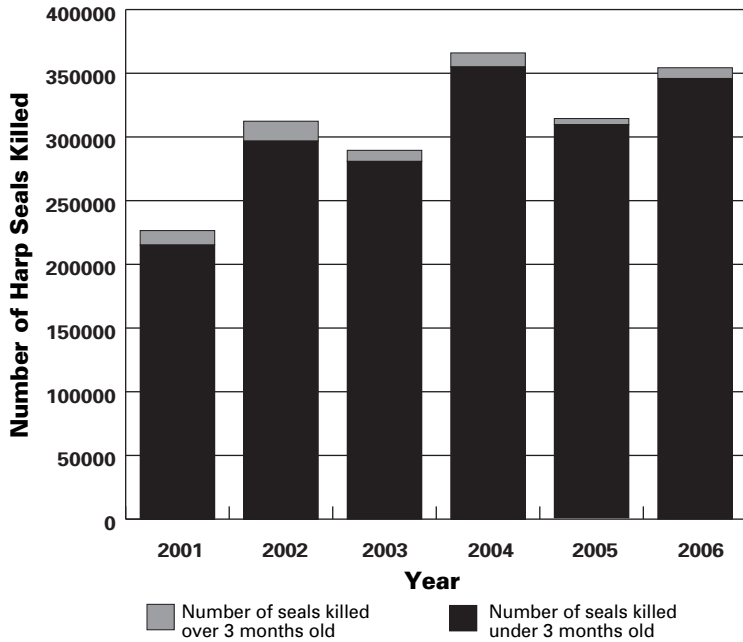
of bad ice conditions. In 1998 and 2000, they estimated that one-quarter of the pups died due to lack of ice before the hunt began (IFAW 2006a).

In 2005 S. Dion, Canada’s environment minister, spoke at the United Nations Climate Change Conference and warned, “Reductions in sea ice will drastically shrink marine habitat for polar bears, ice-inhabiting seals, and some seabirds, pushing some species toward extinction” (Dion 2005, n.p.). The same year, G. Regan, Canada’s minister of fisheries and oceans, allowed sealers to reach one of the highest quotas for ice-dependent harp seals in history.

Animal protection groups note that, in addition to its effects on marine mammal populations, Canada’s commercial seal hunt involves a well-documented and unacceptable level of cruelty. In 2001 an international team of veterinarians, including American, British, and Canadian experts, observed the commercial seal hunt. The team studied the seal hunt from the ice and from the air and performed postmortems on seal carcasses abandoned on the ice. Their report concluded the Canadian commercial seal hunt results in “considerable and unacceptable suffering” and noted in 42 percent of cases studied, the seals did not show enough evidence of cranial injury to even guarantee unconsciousness at the time of skinning (Burdon et al. 2001).

M. Richardson, a Canadian veterinary expert in humane slaughter and the former chairwoman of the Animal Care Review Board for the Solicitor General of Ontario, contends the seal hunt is inherently inhumane because of the environment in which it operates (off-shore, on unstable ice floes, often in extreme weather conditions) and the speed at which it must be conducted to be commercially viable (hundreds of thousands of animals are killed over just a few days)

**Figure 1**  
**Age of Harp Seals**  
**Slaughtered (2001–2006)**



Source data: Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans harp seal landings reports.

(Richardson 2005). In 2005 D. Broom of the University of Cambridge and S. Cheetham, chief veterinary officer of the British Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), reported on footage of the Canadian seal hunt, noting the prolonged suffering of the animals and the inability of the sealers to provide an acceptably humane death to the pups (Broom 2005; Cheetham 2005).

Over six years (2001–2006), virtually all of the seals killed (97 percent) were less than three months old, and most were under one month (Figure 1). The pups in Canada were killed almost exclusively for their fur. Attempts have been made over the years to develop other products, with varying degrees of success. For a short time in the mid-1990s, seal organs brought in a significant percentage of total seal hunt revenues, though that market either closed down or was driven underground in the wake of negative

publicity. The sealing industry has found some success in marketing seal oil, but most of it is sold as an industrial lubricant, and seal-processing plant price lists show sales of seal oil constitute a small amount of the total income generated by the seal hunt (Carino Company Limited 2005). Millions of dollars in direct subsidies were provided to the sealing industry through the late 1990s to try to develop markets for seal meat. However, this endeavor failed, with products such as seal pepperoni finding limited acceptance. Despite the millions of dollars in government subsidies for product development and marketing, seal carcasses are almost always left to rot on the ice floes, and Canadian government officials define the commercial seal hunt as “primarily a fur hunt” (Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans 2006). The skins are shipped, largely in a raw (unprocessed) state, directly to

Europe, where they are tanned and resold in fashion markets.

Canadian sealers are commercial fishermen from Canada’s east coast who participate in several commercial fisheries throughout the year. Government data show they earn on average less than 5 percent of their total annual incomes from sealing. The rest is from commercial fisheries such as crab, shrimp, and lobster (Linzey 2006). This analysis is supported by quotes from sealers in media reports (Warne 2004).

Even in Newfoundland, where more than 90 percent of sealers live, sealing income accounts for less than .1 percent of the gross domestic product. Economists note the few million dollars the sealing industry brings in each year are offset by the high level of government support it receives. As a whole, the sealing industry received more than \$20 million in government subsidies between 1995 and 2001, according to a report by the Canadian Institute for Business and the Environment (Gallon 2001).

In contrast to the relatively marginal economic contribution it makes, animal protection groups argue the commercial seal hunt causes significant damage to Canada’s international reputation and to Canadian businesses.

## The Renewed Fight to Save Seals

*We are absolutely committed to making sure this is the last slaughter of baby seals in Canada anyone will ever have to witness.*

—Paul McCartney, March 2006

Throughout the mid- to late 1990s, animal protection groups around the world were slowly becoming aware of the steadily rising seal hunt quotas in Canada. One after another, organizations launched renewed campaigns—this time to put a “final end” to the Canadian seal hunt.

During those years it became evident that the animal protection community had in some ways become a victim of its own success in the seal campaign. Opinion polls showed the public was largely unaware the seal hunt was even going on (Angus Reid Group 1997), with many believing it had ended for good in the 1980s.

Environment and animal protection organizations argue incomplete and misleading information provided by the Canadian government only helped to confuse the matter. Though government kill reports clearly showed most of the seals killed in the hunt at the time were pups just days or weeks of age, the DFO asserted that hunting baby seals was illegal in Canada, restricting its definition of “baby seal” to the newborn (whitecoat) harp seals protected in Canada from commercial hunting as of 1987. In *Facts about Seals*, the DFO (2000, n.p.) stated, “Young harp seals are independent and completely self-reliant two or three weeks after birth.” Animal protection groups claimed the DFO position was misleading and inaccurate. They noted that seals can be legally hunted in Canada as young as twelve days old, when they begin to shed their white fur, and that most of the seals killed are less than three months of age. The groups argued that, at the young age they are slaughtered, the pups have poorly developed swimming skills and many have not yet eaten solid food, leaving them defenseless against the hunters. Organizations pointed out that public opinion polling in 1997 showed 85 percent of Canadians believed seal pups less than one year of age should be protected from hunting (Angus Reid Group 1997).

Animal protection groups maintained that DFO information regarding the size of the harp seal population was equally misleading. Department publications consistently referred to the harp seal population as being “triple” what it was in the 1970s, neglecting to mention

that overhunting in the 1950s and 1960s had reduced the population by as much as two-thirds by the early 1970s. Animal protection groups argued that what was in reality a recovery from a dangerously low level was being misleadingly represented by the Canadian government as a population explosion.

Inflations of the economic value of the seal hunt were persistent in the DFO messaging. In its 2001 *Facts about Seals*, the DFO (2001) claimed, “The seal hunt provides valuable income to about 12,000 sealers and their families in eastern Canada.” However, in the same year, the executive director of the Canadian Sealers Association stated at a sealing conference,

In Newfoundland, we have 11,000+ licensed sealers with approximately 2,500 of them active in any given year. Sealing licenses are not expensive to buy—they cost \$5.00 a year. The reason for the large number of licenses vis-à-vis the smaller number of active sealers is the fact that if they do not renew their license in any given year, they will not be eligible in the following year. (Greenland Home Rule 2001, 57)

In *Six Facts about Canada's Seal Hunt*, the DFO (2005b) attributed a value of \$40 million for the Canadian seal hunt, a figure several times greater than the amount government landings reports show was actually paid to sealers that year. The DFO claimed the \$40 million figure was provided by the Canadian Sealers Association (CSA), but neither the DFO nor the CSA was able to provide any substantiating evidence. Regardless, the figure continued as of late 2006 to appear prominently on the DFO website.

As the years progressed, it became clear that animal and environment protection groups were opposing more than the sealing industry in their campaign to stop the seal hunt—they were up against the full force of the Canadian government.

It was in this challenging environment that animal protection groups managed to bring the campaign to save the seals once again to the forefront of the public consciousness.

Throughout the 1990s organizations worked on a variety of fronts to end the seal hunt in Canada. Paid advertisements educated Canadians about the humane, conservation, and economic aspects of the commercial seal hunt. Grass-roots initiatives organized by animal protection groups resulted in protests across the country, and tens of thousands of Canadians contacted their political representatives to express their opposition to the seal hunt. Government relations campaigns put the commercial seal hunt onto the agendas of Canadian politicians. Scientific studies raised serious questions about the sustainability of the Canadian government seal hunt management plan.

During this time some advances were made in the campaign. The Canadian government reevaluated some of its estimates of the numbers of seals actually killed during the Canadian seal hunt, and the new calculations were incorporated into management plans. Canada began to relax its arguably unlawful restrictions on seal hunt observers, which had previously made it very difficult to obtain footage of the seal hunt. Possibly in response to opinion polls showing the majority of Canadians, including Newfoundlanders, opposed government subsidies to the seal hunt (Angus Reid Group 1997), direct subsidies to sealers were phased out before 2000.

However, the Canadian government continued to expand the sealing industry, and despite the best intentions of the animal protection groups, kill levels continued to increase...with one notable exception. In 2000, with the direct meat subsidy to sealers eliminated, the kill level dramatically declined, to under 100,000 animals. Animal protection groups hoped, perhaps naively, that the hunt was finally beginning to

wind down in favor of less controversial economic opportunities.

Unfortunately, the reprieve was brief. Some argue the subsidies were never really removed but rather driven underground by negative publicity. Seal hunt numbers began to climb again in the following year, and in 2002 more than 300,000 seals were killed, the highest kill level in thirty-five years.

April 2004 marked a turning point in the campaign, when *The New York Times* featured the seal hunt controversy on its front page (Krauss 2004). In the weeks that followed, major media outlets all over the globe, including those throughout Canada, the United States, Europe, Australia, South America, and Asia, covered the story. In the second year of the “million seal quota,” the world was finally becoming aware that Canada’s seal hunt was back and twice as large as when animal protection groups first campaigned to stop it.

However, rather than working to end the hunt in the wake of the negative publicity, the Canadian government stepped up its defense and promotion of the sealing industry, allocating the highest quotas for harp seals in history. Animal protection groups countered with a hard-hitting strategy to increase economic pressure on the Canadian fishing industry—a boycott of Canadian seafood products.

## The Canadian Seafood Boycott

*The message is simple; it will be heard across the world. If you oppose Canada’s merciless slaughter of baby seals, don’t buy Canadian seafood products.*

—Wayne Pacelle, President and CEO of The Humane Society of the United States, press conference, 2005

In November 2004, in a meeting between Canada’s Department of

Fisheries and Oceans and animal protection groups, government officials said that the only environment in which the seal hunt could end would be if Canada’s fishing industry demanded it. This was likely due to the close ties between the Canadian sealing and fishing industries; Canadian sealers are commercial fishermen who hunt seals in the off-season, and fisheries unions represent sealers (Fish, Food, and Allied Workers Union 2001).

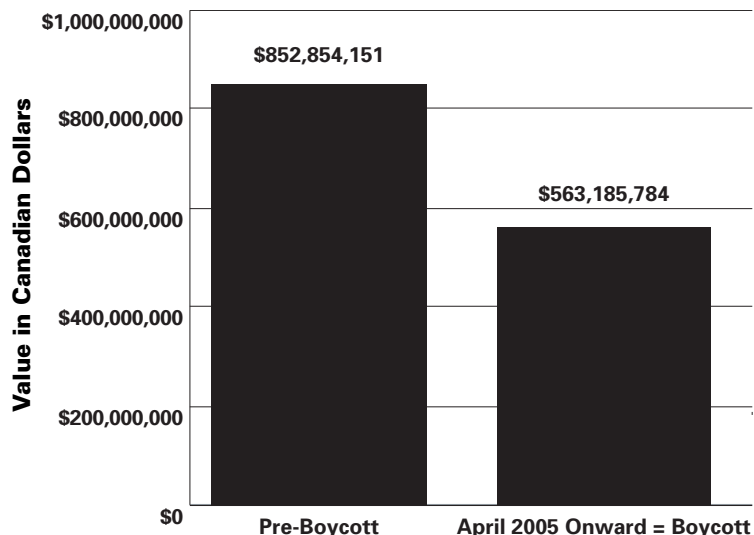
Thus, following decades of unsuccessful negotiations with the Canadian government, a network of some of the world’s most influential animal protection groups created an economic incentive for the Canadian fishing industry to act. Noting the success of the 1980s seafood boycott in changing Canadian government policy on the seal hunt, the network, which represents tens of millions of people worldwide, declared a boycott of Canadian seafood products until the seal hunt is permanently ended (HSUS 2005).

About two-thirds of Canadian seafood is exported every year to the United States, generating nearly \$3 billion for the Canadian economy annually (Department of Fisheries and Oceans 2005a). This made the United States an obvious initial focus for the campaign to boycott Canadian seafood. With its millions of members and constituents across the United States, The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) was in a natural position to lead the effort.

The HSUS launched the seafood boycott in the United States on March, 29, 2005, the opening day of the 2005 commercial seal hunt. As of mid-2006, The HSUS reported more than 330,000 Americans and more than one thousand major restaurants, grocery stores, and seafood wholesalers in the United States pledged not to buy Canadian seafood until the seal hunt is ended for good. Since the boycott was launched, official government trade statistics through July 2006 showed the value of Canadian snow crab—a

### Figure 2 Decline in Value of Canadian Snow Crab Exports to the United States

Total value of Canadian snow crab exports to the United States down 34 percent (CDN\$290 million) since the ProtectSeals seafood boycott began.



Source: Canadian international trade data from Statistics Canada through July 2006 (HS 03.06.14.10).

primary focus of the boycott—exports to the United States had declined by nearly \$300 million (Figure 2). While animal protection groups have never claimed the boycott is the only reason for the decline, they viewed it as a significant factor (HSUS 2006).

The Canadian government denied the seafood boycott had had any impact, blaming the decrease in the value of Canadian snow crab exports to the United States on market conditions and competition from other countries. However, in July 2006 Greenland's *Grønlandsposten* reported the boycott of Canadian seafood had directly affected Royal Greenland's sales of Canadian seafood in the United States (AG/*Grønlandsposten* 2006). Royal Greenland, the world's largest distributor of cold water shrimp, said its client

restaurants that formerly bought Canadian shrimp are now asking for the more expensive Greenland variety because of the boycott.

While the seafood boycott puts economic pressure on the Canadian government and fishing industry to end the seal hunt, closing the global markets for seal products is starting to remove the primary incentive for sealers to hunt seals.

### Global Markets for Seal Products Begin to Close

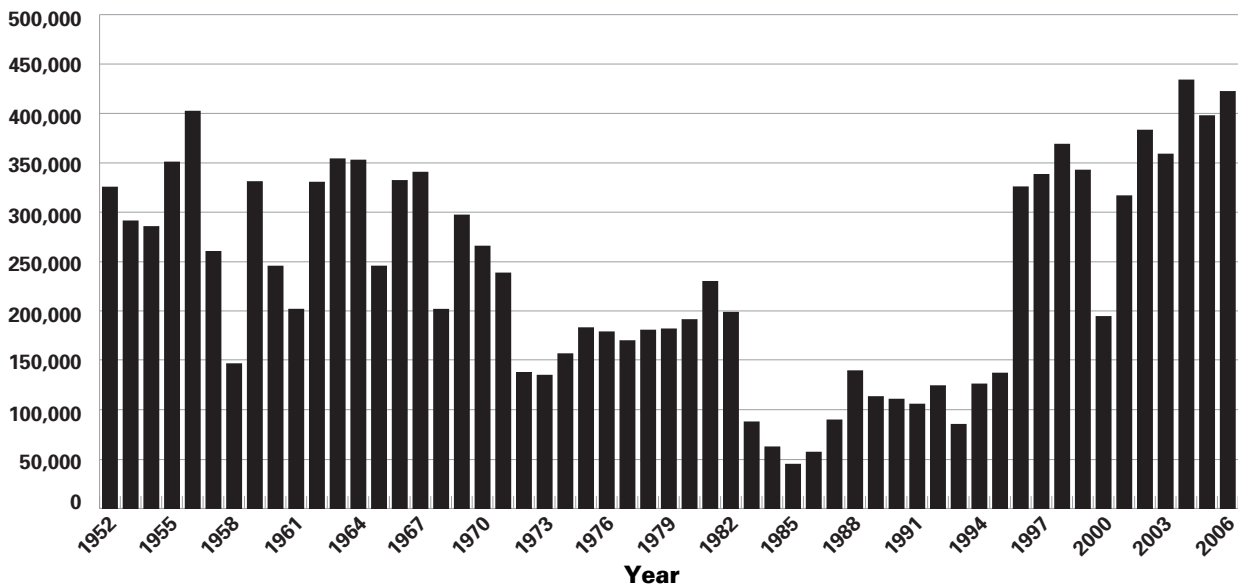
*The Assembly undertakes to promote in every forum regulatory initiatives aimed at prohibiting the import and use of seals or seal parts....The Assembly also asks the Committee of Ministers and the parliaments of the Member States to exert pressure on the Canadian Government and Parliament to*

*cease this cruel practice, which is unbecoming of a civilized nation.*

—2004 Motion for a Recommendation, submitted to the Council of Europe by Claudio Azzolini, Italian foreign minister

The 1980s European Union Directive prohibiting the trade in products derived from newborn (white-coat) harp seals and young (blueback) hooded seals brought Canada's commercial seal hunt to a virtual standstill for a number of years (Figure 3). But while the intent of the legislation was to decrease demand for products of seal pups (and thus the incentive for sealers to hunt them), Canadian sealers simply began to kill the pups when they were just a few days older (Figure 1). Today, the skins of these young seals are legally traded in many parts of Europe (Figure 4).

**Figure 3**  
**Total Reported Kill of Harp Seals in the Northwest Atlantic, 1952–2006**

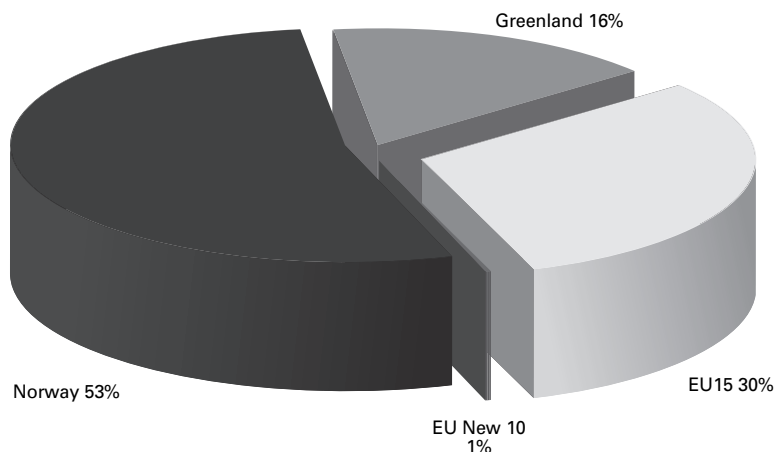


Note: Includes Canadian commercial seal hunt and Arctic and Greenland harp seal catches. Catches for Greenland are estimated for 2005 and 2006. Canadian catch for 2006 is preliminary.

Sources: Graph courtesy of S. Fink; data updated from: Stenson (2005).

## Figure 4 Canadian Exports of Sealskins to Europe, 2004

Exports of Raw and Unassembled Tanned Sealskins = 272,362 Pelts



Source: Eurostat and Statistics Canada.

As Canada's commercial seal hunt once again achieved international notoriety in 2004, international governments began to act on behalf of their citizens to put an end to their trade in all harp and hooded seal products. Belgium was the first country to take action, adopting a legislative proposal in May 2004 to ban the import/export and marketing of all seal products (Fink 2006). Soon other nations began to act as well; Croatia, Luxembourg, Mexico, and the Netherlands had all either ended their trade in seal products or had initiated campaigns to do so by 2006 (IFAW 2006b).

### Initial Support from Greenland

On January 5, 2006, footage obtained by The HSUS of the 2005 commercial seal hunt was broadcast on Danish and Greenland national television stations. Public and government reaction was strong and swift, with Danish animal protection groups and parliamentarians publicly stating their opposition to

Canada's commercial seal hunt (Danish Broadcasting Corporation 2006a). Just twenty-three hours after the footage was aired, Greenland Prime Minister H. Enoksen announced to the Danish and Greenlandic media that his cabinet had decided to stop all of the Great Greenland Company's trade in Canadian sealskins (Danish Broadcasting Corporation 2006b).

The decision removed an important market for Canada's commercial seal hunt; in 2004 and 2005, Canadian government trade statistics revealed that Greenland had imported more than ninety thousand Canadian sealskins.

The Canadian government and fur industry reacted strongly. A. Herscovici of the Fur Council of Canada weighed in on the topic in *Nunatsiaq News*, sending a clear message to Greenland. According to Herscovici, the Greenland government would "only hurt themselves if they try to distance their seal hunting from images of clubbed baby seals in Atlantic Canada." He continued, "[I]f they [animal protection groups] are successful in stopping the Atlantic Canada hunt,

which they perceive as inhumane, their next target will be aboriginal hunters" (in Minoque 2006, n.p.).

On February 3, 2006, a leading Newfoundland newspaper reported that several high-level officials with the Inuit Circumpolar Conference and the government of Nunavut met with Greenland officials to present the "Canadian argument" on the matter (Baker 2006). On March 24 a high-level delegation from Canada went to Greenland to discuss trade opportunities between the two countries. The delegation included F. Gregory, Canada's ambassador to Denmark; J. Anawak, Canada's ambassador for Circumpolar Affairs; and G. Beaupré, director general of International Affairs, Fisheries, and Oceans Canada. While no specific mention of lobbying against the sealskin decision was made, the published trip itinerary shows meetings between the senior Canadian delegates and Greenland's premier and minister of Fisheries and Hunting (Greenland Home Rule 2006a). Within weeks, the Greenland Home Rule government sent out a media advisory announcing it would once again allow Great Greenland to trade in Canadian sealskins (Greenland Home Rule 2006b).

Danish parliamentarians quickly urged Greenland to reconsider, noting any resumption in trade of Canadian sealskins could severely damage Greenland's sealing industry (Greenland National Broadcasting Company 2006). Denmark's foreign office then announced it would investigate the potential for a Danish ban on trade in Canadian sealskins. While the Greenland government had lifted its order for Great Greenland to stop trading in Canadian sealskins, as of mid-2006 it remained uncertain whether Great Greenland would actually resume the trade.

Such a move would likely be met with strong opposition from the animal protection community and the Danish public and government. The point, however, already may be moot. Many of the sealskins imported by

Greenland from Canada are re-exported into the EU, and the EU was as of 2006 taking action to stop its own trade in harp and hooded seal products.

## The EU Resolves to Ban Seal Products

On September 6, 2006, the European Parliament adopted a written declaration instructing the European Commission to “immediately draft a regulation to ban the import, export, and sale of all harp and hooded seal products” (Lucas 2006). Four hundred twenty-five members of the European Parliament signed the Declaration, the highest level of support for any resolution in the history of the European Parliament. While the Canadian Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, L. Hearn, attempted to dismiss the resolution as “really nothing” (Canadian Press 2006a), others were not so convinced. In a September 7, 2006, press release, Canadian senator L. Milne, who also serves as president of the Canada Europe Parliamentary Association, stated of Hearn, “If he can’t understand how important this declaration is, he doesn’t understand his job” (Liberal Party of Canada 2006, n.p.). Milne’s sentiments are perhaps understandable. Canadian export statistics indicate the EU is a consistent and significant market for unprocessed (raw) sealskins and other seal products. Moreover, the implications of an EU prohibition on harp and hooded seal products are even greater, given the untracked exports of tanned sealskins from Canada to Europe (there is no distinct trade category for tanned sealskins in Canada); the powerful fashion markets in France and Italy; and the European retail trade of garments and other finished products made from sealskin and seal leather.

## A Sealing License Retirement Plan

*We are providing you with an alternative to what Paul McCartney called “a stain on the character of the Canadian people...” If this is really simply an economic problem, then take our offer.*

—Cathy Kangas, founder and CEO of PRAI Beauty, letter to Canadian Prime

Minister S. Harper, April 2006  
In March 2006 animal protection groups escorted Paul and Heather McCartney to the ice floes in the Gulf of St. Lawrence to be photographed in the harp seal nursery. The McCartneys made an impassioned plea to Canadian Prime Minister S. Harper to end the seal hunt and for the Canadian government to consider investing in a license retirement plan for sealers. The unprecedented media coverage may have increased hostilities from the sealing community, with media reports of violence from sealers toward seal hunt observers occurring just weeks later (CBC News 2006a). However, the McCartneys’ proposed buyout plan did achieve some support from both seal hunt advocates and opponents.

License retirement programs have been implemented over the past few decades in Canada, the United States, Britain, Europe, Australia, and elsewhere in the wake of fishery closures and reductions (Nautilus Consultants 1997). The programs can take many forms, but they generally involve providing federal funds in exchange for fishing licenses. This kind of program has already been put into practice in Canada for marine mammal hunts; in the 1970s Canada declared a moratorium on commercial whaling and instituted a buyback program for whaling licenses (Williams and George n.d.).

In April 2006 BBC News reported that American businesswoman C. Kangas had made an offer of \$16 million to the Canadian government

to be used for a sealing license retirement program to end the commercial seal hunt. A Department of Fisheries and Oceans spokesperson turned down the offer quickly, stating, “The short answer is no. We’re not interested in the offer and would prefer she put the money in another worthwhile cause” (British Broadcasting Corporation 2006, n.p.).

The sealing industry was not as quick to turn away. On April 15, 2006, the *Montreal Gazette* reported that sealers from Prince Edward Island were open to the concept of a buyout (Canadian Press 2006b, 10). K. MacLeod, a local sealer said, “I talked to quite a few of the license holders here in P.E.I. and everyone is willing to give this a try.” He concluded that sealers would like to “explore the alternatives” and observed, “It’s the twenty-first century.”

## Conclusions

P. Moore, a co-founder of Greenpeace, once said, “What the seal hunt represented was the paramount focus for public attention on the need to change our basic attitude and relationship to nature and to the species that make it up” (in Herscovici 1998, n.p.). In this he was correct; for the true cost of resumption of commercial sealing is far greater than the seals it claims each year, and those working both for and against it are well aware of what is at stake.

In the wake of the 1990s cod collapse, the Canadian government clearly felt secure in rejuvenating the commercial seal hunt, which had caused so much controversy in previous decades. Perhaps it believed that the animal protection movement had diminished over the years or that seal hunt proponents had laid a strong enough public relations foundation to weather any opposition. Instead, the Canadian government soon found itself to be the focus of strong domestic and

international criticism for rejuvenating the seal hunt.

Throughout the 1990s seal hunt proponents spent much of their efforts either discounting or scorning efforts by animal protection organizations to stop the commercial seal hunt. However, more recently, high-profile celebrities and hard-hitting campaign tactics by animal protection groups have brought the plight of seals in Canada to the forefront of public consciousness, creating a backlash of opposition to the hunt that has been impossible to ignore. In response the Canadian government has launched a full-scale effort in defense of commercial sealing interests, committing the resources of several federal government departments. Senior Canadian government officials, including the prime minister, have spoken out regularly in defense of the sealing industry in Canada, and Canadian delegations have lobbied in Europe to prevent seal product trade restrictions.

Only time will reveal the fate of the harp and hooded seals of the northwest Atlantic, but to seal hunt opponents, the events of the past decade could perhaps be summarized by the oft-used words of Mahatma Gandhi: "First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you...then you win."

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