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Atlantic Canadian Anti-Sealing Coalition Condemns DFO Plans for Massive Grey Seal Cull

HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA - 6/21/09 - Atlantic Canadian Anti-Sealing Coalition has condemned DFO's plan for a cull of 50,000 grey seals, stating such a plan is politically motivated with no basis in science.

On June 16, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans announced its Fisheries Management Decisions 2009. Included in the Minister's directions was the re-closure of the commercial cod fishery in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence and the targeted removal of grey seals preying on southern Gulf cod. Earlier this year DFO raised the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) of grey seals to 50,000. According to DFO's website, 84% of the TAC will be taken in the Scotian Shelf, including grey seals on Sable Island which had been previously protected by the federal government.

"It is reprehensible that the Minister has called for the slaughter of 50,000 grey seals to aid in cod recovery when science simply does not support such a plan," declared Bridget Curran, director of Atlantic Canadian Anti-Sealing Coalition. "Scientists have stated repeatedly there is no evidence that killing seals will aid in fish stock recovery. Why, then, is the Minister determined to direct a large-scale cull? Simply put, she is buying the votes of Atlantic fishers in preparation for an upcoming federal election."

The Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat in its Report published this year stated evidence of the impact of grey seal predation on depleted stocks is inconclusive. Further, the report of the recent DFO National Workshop on the Impacts of Seals on Fish Populations in Eastern Canada stated there is no analysis to suggest fewer seals would have a positive effect on fish stock recovery.

"Once again, DFO is using seals as scapegoats to hide its own incompetence," continued Bridget Curran. "DFO ignored advice from its own scientists when it re-opened the southern Gulf commercial cod fishery. Now, to avert attention from its mismanagement and to placate fishers who are again prevented from fishing in that area, it is declaring grey seals guilty of necessitating the re-closure."

The fishing industry is calling for a 50% reduction in grey seal populations in five years. Such a reduction rate, if approved, would likely catapult grey seals onto the IUCN Red List as endangered. Such a move worries Curran.

"In Canada, important decisions affecting the health of our oceans are made based on political expediency rather than sound science. As we have seen in the past, fishermen generally get what they want, using their votes as leverage. As a top predator in our oceans, seals play a vital role. To remove large numbers of grey seals is incredibly irresponsible and will further ravage an already frail eco-system severely damaged by human over-exploitation."

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Atlantic Canadian Anti-Sealing Coalition, based in Halifax, Nova Scotia, was formed to give a much-needed voice to the many Atlantic Canadians who oppose the commercial killing of seals, both in Canada and abroad. The Coalition has a growing membership as well as a large network of national and international supporters. The Coalition can be found online at www.antisealingcoalition.ca.