

# FAST FACTS ON CANADA'S GREY SEAL SLAUGHTER

## About Grey Seals:

- Grey seals are from the order Carnivora and the family Phocidae (true seals), and are also known as "horsehead" seals because of their distinctive long heads.
- Globally, grey seals are split into three separate populations: the Western Atlantic population, the Eastern Atlantic population and the Baltic population. Canada holds most of the Western Atlantic population, which is distributed along the shores of eastern Canada.
- Grey seals generally live between 15 and 25 years but have a maximum life expectancy of 46 years. Grey seals are gregarious and gather together for breeding, moulting and hauling out.
- The grey seals' breeding season takes place from mid-December to early February. Depending on location and availability of ice, grey seals will breed on land-fast ice or ice floes or, if no ice is available, they choose the rocky shores or sandy beaches of small islands. In recent years, decreasing ice cover in the northwest Atlantic has forced more grey seals to give birth on land.
- Grey seal pups nurse for the first two weeks of their lives, during which time they are covered with a white, wooly coat. They begin to moult their white coats at two to three weeks of age.
- Once the pups are weaned, mother grey seals leave the pups to fend for themselves. The pups live off fat reserves for several weeks after weaning, and eventually go out to sea to begin feeding. They are known to wander widely, with distances of over 1,000 km not uncommon.



## About the Grey Seal Hunt:

- Grey seals have been commercially hunted in Canada for hundreds of years. By 1949, the grey seal was considered extirpated off Canada's east coast as a direct result of commercial hunting.
- In recent years, the grey seal population has slowly recovered. According to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Canada's grey seal population measured about 250,000 animals in 2004.
- Today, commercial fishermen hunt grey seal pups for their fur, which is sold in foreign fashion markets.
- The Total Allowable Catch for grey seals for 2007 was 2,000 seals in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and 7,000 seals on the Scotian Shelf.



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- In 2008, a quota of 2500 grey seals was authorized for Hay Island, a part of the protected Scaterie Island Wilderness Area off Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Within days, sealers had killed more than 1200 grey seal pups on Hay Island.
- According to Nova Scotia's Wilderness Areas Protection Act, the government can only allow commercial hunting in protected areas if it can prove the hunting will benefit the indigenous ecosystem of the protected area.
- The Government of Nova Scotia and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans have been unable to provide any proof that culling grey seals would in any way benefit the ecosystem of Hay Island.

#### **About Grey Seals and Fisheries:**

- Grey seals are opportunistic feeders, and consume many different prey species – many of them non commercial fish species and predators of commercially targeted fish stocks.
- According to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, commercial hunting of seals in Canada is “not an attempt to assist in the recovery of groundfish stocks.” The DFO notes, “Seals eat cod, but seals also eat other fish that prey on cod. There are several factors contributing to the lack of recovery of Atlantic cod stocks such as fishing effort, the poor physical condition of the fish, poor growth, unfavourable ocean conditions and low stock productivity at current levels. It is widely accepted in the scientific community that there are many uncertainties in the estimates of the amount of fish consumed by seals. Seals and cod exist in a complex ecosystem, which mitigates against easy analysis or simple solutions to problems such as the lack of recovery of cod stocks.”
- The fishing industry on Canada's east coast, while openly continuing destructive fishing practices such as over-fishing and bottom trawling, has absurdly attempted to scapegoat seals for dwindling fish stocks. But while there is clear evidence that over-fishing and destructive fishing techniques have negative impacts on fish stocks, the myth that culling seals will benefit fish stock recovery is not supported by any credible scientific evidence.

#### **Public and Government Response:**

- In the past few years, Belgium, Italy, Germany, Austria, Slovenia, the Netherlands, France, Luxembourg, Croatia, Mexico and Panama have either ended their trade in seal products, or announced their intention to do so. In doing so they join the United States, which has banned its trade in seal products since 1972.
- The European Commission is currently considering drafting legislation that would ban all seal product trade within the European Union.
- 66 percent of Canadians holding an opinion support European nations banning seal product trade (Pollara 2007).
- 67 percent of Canadians holding an opinion oppose their government spending public money to lobby foreign governments on behalf of the sealing industry (Pollara 2007).

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