

# SEALS AND SEALING IN CANADA



2005



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Sheryl Fink and David Lavigne  
All photos ©IFAW

For additional information please contact us at:

IFAW  
1474 Gordon St.  
Guelph, ON, Canada  
N1L 1C8  
Phone: (519) 767-1948  
[sfink@ifaw.org](mailto:sfink@ifaw.org)

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## Nature's Wonder, Human Plunder

Each spring, the East coast of Canada is host to one of the world's great wildlife spectacles. It is here that female harp seals congregate by the hundreds of thousands on newly formed sea ice to give birth to their pups.

The adult seals have arrived here from the summer feeding areas in the eastern Canadian Arctic and off West Greenland. They move ahead of the forming ice edge, arriving at the southern end of their range in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and off the coast of Newfoundland by late December or early January.

The seals give birth from late February until mid-March, transforming the once barren ice floes into a huge, white nursery. The newborn pups – thin, scraggly and yellow at birth – will become fat, fluffy “whitecoats” in about a week, thanks to the high-fat content of their mothers’ milk. The pups spend much of their time sleeping, and are so inactive that on sunny days the ice will melt beneath them, creating body-shaped cradles on the ice surface. After about 12 days, the mothers will leave their fully fed pups and join adult males for the annual mating ritual. Later in the season the adult seals, along with many immature, non-breeding seals (called “bedlamers”), will haul out on ice further north to undergo the annual moult. They then continue their migration back to the subarctic waters between eastern Canada and West Greenland.

The newly-weaned pups remain on the ice, crying for their mothers at first, before becoming extremely quiet and sedentary. During this time they survive on the thick layer of blubber they have accumulated during nursing. Soon, they begin to moult their white coats, and can be seen rolling on their backs, rubbing the ice as if trying to scratch an unbearable itch. A few days later, their white coats will be lost entirely to reveal the sleek, black-spotted, silvery pelt of the young harp seal pup known as a “beater.”

It is this pelt that is now the target for commercial sealers, who have been waiting nearby, eager to make a few dollars from the skins that will be turned into non-essential products for the luxury fur market. Over 300,000 seal pups – about a third of those estimated to be born this year – will be killed by hunters before they reach three months of age.

The Canadian seal hunt is the world's largest remaining commercial hunt for any marine mammal.



**ABOUT ONE-THIRD OF THE HARP SEAL PUPS BORN THIS YEAR WILL BE KILLED BY SEALERS BEFORE THEY REACH 3 MONTHS OF AGE.**

## Harp seals

The harp seal is one of the best known of all the seals. Its scientific name, *Pagophilus groenlandicus*, means “ice lover from Greenland.” Harp seals are widely distributed, inhabiting the North Atlantic and Arctic Oceans from Newfoundland and the Gulf of St. Lawrence (Canada) in the West to northern Russia in the East (see map below). The harp seal is a highly gregarious and migratory species that lives in close association with pack ice. Its annual range is essentially defined by the northern and southern limits of pack ice, in summer and winter, respectively.

There are three distinct populations, based on small physical, genetic, and behavioural differences. In addition to the Northwest Atlantic population – the one hunted off eastern Canada in the spring and West Greenland in the summer – there is a second population that lives off the East coast of Greenland and breeds on sea ice near the island of Jan Mayen. The third population lives mainly in the Barents Sea and reproduces in the White Sea off the coast of Russia.

### Harp Seal (*Pagophilus groenlandicus*)



*An adult harp seal with her whitecoat pup.*

Adult weight	.....130 kg (290 lbs)
Adult length	.....1.7 m (5.5 ft)
Age at sexual maturity	..... 5-6 years
Age at first reproduction	.....about 6-7 years
Life span (max.)	.....about 30 years
Number of pups per year	.....1
Pup birth weight	.....11 kg (24 lbs)
Duration of nursing	.....about 12 days
Growth rate of pup per day	.....2.2 kg (5 lbs)
Weaning weight	..... 36 kg (80 lbs)



The Canadian government estimates that pup production in the Northwest Atlantic population was 998,000 ± 200,000 (mean ±95% confidence limits) in 1999. The 2000 population size was estimated to be 5.2 million (±1.2 million). A new population survey was conducted in spring 2004 but the results are not expected until after the 2005 hunt.

The most recent assessment for the Jan Mayen population estimated the pup production and 1+ (seals one year of age or older) population size for 2003 to be on the order of 70,000 and 350,000 animals, respectively.

Aerial surveys conducted in the White Sea in 2003 found pup production to be on the order of 330,000. Estimates of the 1+ population size ranged from 1.6 to 2.1 million animals.

Harp seals share much of their range throughout the North Atlantic with a second, larger species of seal, the hooded seal. Since this species is also part of the Canadian seal hunt story, we introduce it next.

## Hooded Seal (*Cystophora cristata*)



*An adult hooded seal with her blueback pup.*

Adult weight	
male	.....300 kg (661 lbs)
female	.....200 kg (441 lbs)
Adult length	
male	.....2.5 m (8.2 ft)
female	.....2.2 m (7.2 ft)
Age at sexual maturity	.....3-4 years
Life span (max.)	.....about 30 years
Number of pups per year	.....1
Pup birth weight	......25 kg (55 lbs)
Duration of nursing	......4 days
Growth rate of pup per day	......7 kg (15 lbs)
Weaning weight	......55 kg (121 lbs)

## Hooded seals

The hooded seal, *Cystophora cristata*, is a large, silver-gray seal with a black face and irregular black spots covering most of its body. Its common name refers to the inflatable bladder located on top of the nose and forehead of adult males. When relaxed, this bladder forms a loose, wrinkled sac that hangs over the front of the nose. When inflated, it becomes a large “hood” that covers the face and top of the head. Males can also extrude their elastic nasal septums through one of their nostrils to form a large pink balloon. These structures are secondary sexual characteristics that males use to display to other seals during the breeding season.

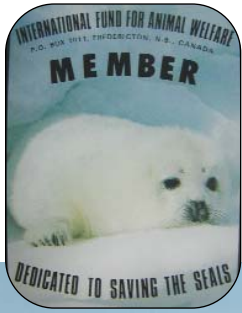
The hooded seals’ range overlaps with that of the harp seal throughout much of the North Atlantic (see map below). Like harp seals, hooded seals are migratory, their annual movements closely following the drifting pack ice. In Canadian waters, they give birth to their pups and mate in the same areas as harp seals, but a little later in the season, in the second half of March.

Compared to harp seals, hooded seal pups are born at an advanced developmental stage, having already shed their first coats of hair in the mother’s womb. At birth, the pups are at an equivalent stage of development to the harp seal beater. Hooded seal pups are called bluebacks, named for the colour of their pelts, which are blue-black on the back and silver-gray on the belly.

Hooded seals are more solitary than harp seals, making both surveying and hunting this species a greater challenge. Currently, there are no reliable estimates of the size of the hooded seal population in the Northwest Atlantic, the population being described by scientists as “data poor.” Earlier estimates placed their numbers at less than 500,000 animals. A population survey for hooded seals is scheduled for spring, 2005.

The current total allowable catch for the Canadian hooded seal hunt remains at 10,000 animals, but only a few hundred have been killed in recent years. It is illegal in Canada to kill bluebacks or to sell, barter or trade their pelts.





## IFAW's Fight to End Canada's Commercial Seal Hunt

Commercial sealing for pelts and oil has been an on-going activity in the Northwest Atlantic for several centuries. Few people knew it existed, however, until television first brought the hunt into homes around the world in 1964.

IFAW was established in 1969 with the explicit goal of ending the commercial seal hunt in Atlantic Canada. At the time, there was widespread scientific concern over the declining harp seal population.

Prior to 1971, the seal hunt off eastern Canada was largely unregulated. Annual catches of harp seals often surpassed 300,000 animals. Typically, more than 80% of the catch was made up of whitecoated pups. By 1971, scientists estimated that the harp seal population had declined by as much as two-thirds, and quota management was finally introduced to limit the number of animals killed. By that time, images of nursing whitecoats being skinned in front of their mothers had permeated the public consciousness, and the outcry about the inherent cruelty associated with the hunt was growing.

IFAW's most significant achievement for the protection of harp seals occurred in 1983 when the European Community imposed a temporary ban on the importation of pelts from whitecoated harp seal pups and blueback hooded seal pups. The ban was renewed in 1985 and made indefinite in 1989.

The European import ban, combined with a reduced demand for seal products worldwide, resulted in a marked decline in the numbers of seals killed over the next 15 years (see figure at right). Over this period, landed catches of harp seals averaged about 60,000 animals per year and the depleted population had an opportunity to recover.

In 1995, Brian Tobin, the Canadian fisheries minister at the time, increased the quota for harp seals, claiming that they were impeding the recovery of depleted cod stocks. To promote his political decision, which was not supported by any scientific evidence, the minister also announced a new subsidy program to encourage sealers to kill more seals. The provincial government of Newfoundland and Labrador also began to offer new subsidies for landed seal meat.



### EMBARGO BEGINS OCT. 1 THIS YEAR EEC Agrees To Two-Year Seal Ban

The Guardian, Charlottetown, Tues., March 1, 1983.



### European MPs declare seal industry unjustified

*Overfishing real villain in cod fishery crisis*

BY PETER FRASER  
Staff Writer

The seal industry cannot be justified despite its importance to native people, European parliamentarians said in Charlottetown Thursday.

Visiting Charlottetown to examine the role of seal hunting in the cod fishery crisis, the parliamentarians said the message they will bring home with them is: overfishing is the real villain — not seals.

The four members of the European Parliament were visiting at the request of the International Fund for Animal Welfare as part of a fact-finding mission.

**NO CONNECTION**  
A spokesman for the government of Newfoundland and Labrador told a news conference here that the seal industry and overfishing have no connection.

The politicians met Wednesday with representatives of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and Inuit leaders to try and gain a broader perspective on the cod problem.

Referring to the meetings, Mr. Spencer said: "We haven't seen all sides of it, but we've had a jolly good shot at it."

The MPs flew by helicopter Wednesday to see seals on the icy Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Mr. Spencer called the trip "a fabulous experience for all of us."

The politicians expressed amazement at the number of seals being hunted in Canada.

"It's not the kind of thing we associate with Canadians," Mr. Spencer said.

**NO DEMAND**  
The MPs said there is no demand in Europe for seal pelts or seal meat, and they didn't understand why there was so much seal hunting going on.

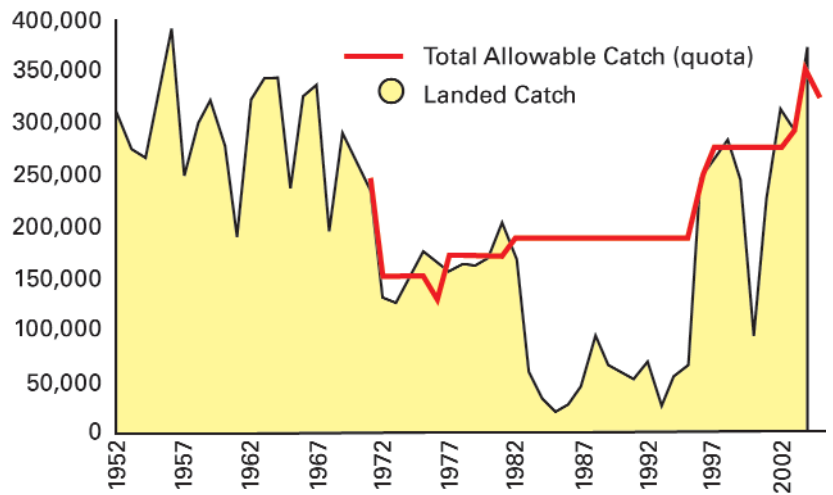
The seal industry for pelts and oil has been an on-going activity in the Northwest Atlantic for several centuries.

By 1996, the annual catches of harp seals began to increase dramatically (see figure at right). Since then, the quota has been increased twice. It was first raised in 1996 to 275,000 harp seals per year.

Then, in 2003, a three-year quota of 975,000 harp seals was announced. According to the government's 2003-2005 Management Plan, the hunt was not to exceed 350,000 in any two of the three years, leaving 275,000 for the third year.

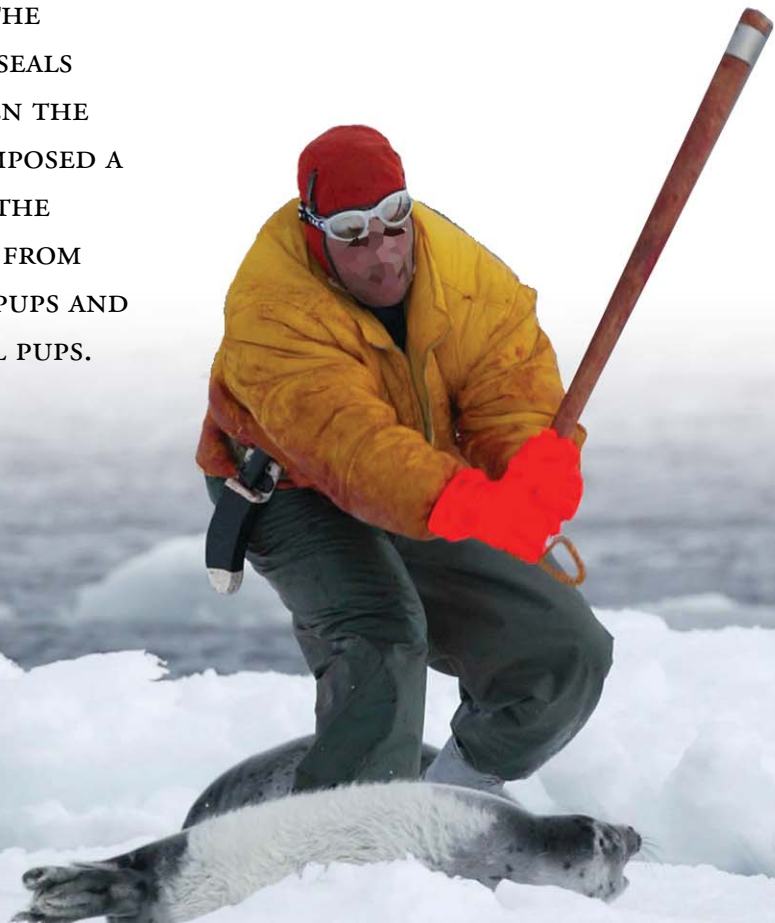
In actuality, 289,512 harp seals were landed in 2003, and 365,971 in 2004.

For 2005, the Canadian government has announced that the total allowable catch will be 319,500 (for a complete summary of landed catches from 1971 to 2004, see Appendix 1).



*The landed catches of harp seals today has reached levels that caused the population to decline by as much as two-thirds between 1950 and 1970.*

IFAW'S MOST SIGNIFICANT  
ACHIEVEMENT FOR THE  
PROTECTION OF HARP SEALS  
OCCURRED IN 1983 WHEN THE  
EUROPEAN COMMUNITY IMPOSED A  
TEMPORARY BAN ON THE  
IMPORTATION OF PELTS FROM  
WHITECOATED HARP SEAL PUPS AND  
BLUEBACK HOODED SEAL PUPS.





## Sealing: The issues

The Canadian government, and other proponents of the seal hunt, claim that it is humane and well regulated, and does not threaten the seal population. Some argue that the seal hunt is necessary to control seal predation on groundfish, including depleted cod stocks, and to maintain the “balance of nature.”

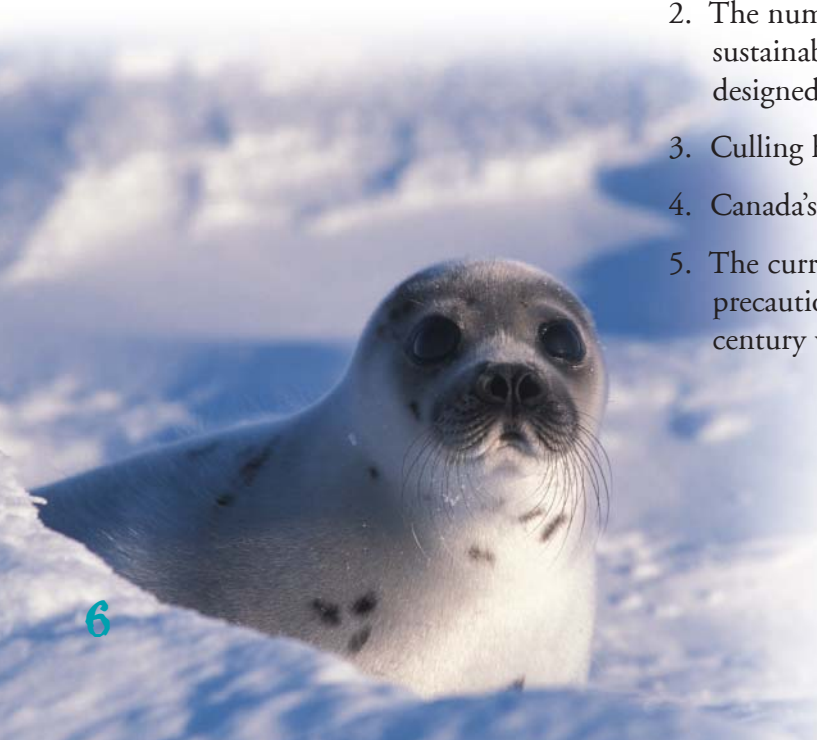
Those opposed to the hunt argue that it is inherently cruel and impossible to monitor adequately. They note that the total allowable catch currently set by the government exceeds its own estimate of what is biologically sustainable. They point to the fact that despite years of research, there is still no evidence that harp seals are preventing the recovery of any fish stock. They also note that the “balance of nature” is a myth, one that professional ecologists put to rest over 70 years ago.

As the government embarks on overseas missions to promote the seal hunt, especially in Europe, and industry struggles to find new markets for seal products, many people continue to question the necessity and validity of this yearly slaughter.

## IFAW’s Position on Canada’s Commercial Seal Hunt

Since its inception, IFAW has fought to end Canada’s commercial seal hunt. Today we remain opposed to the hunt because:

1. It is unacceptably cruel.
2. The number of seals being killed is not biologically sustainable; the hunt is now a government sanctioned cull designed to reduce the size of the population.
3. Culling harp seals is not scientifically justifiable.
4. Canada’s commercial seal hunt is not economically viable.
5. The current management plan does not satisfy the precautionary principles that should be fundamental to 21<sup>st</sup> century wildlife conservation.



## 1. Canada's commercial seal hunt is unacceptably cruel.

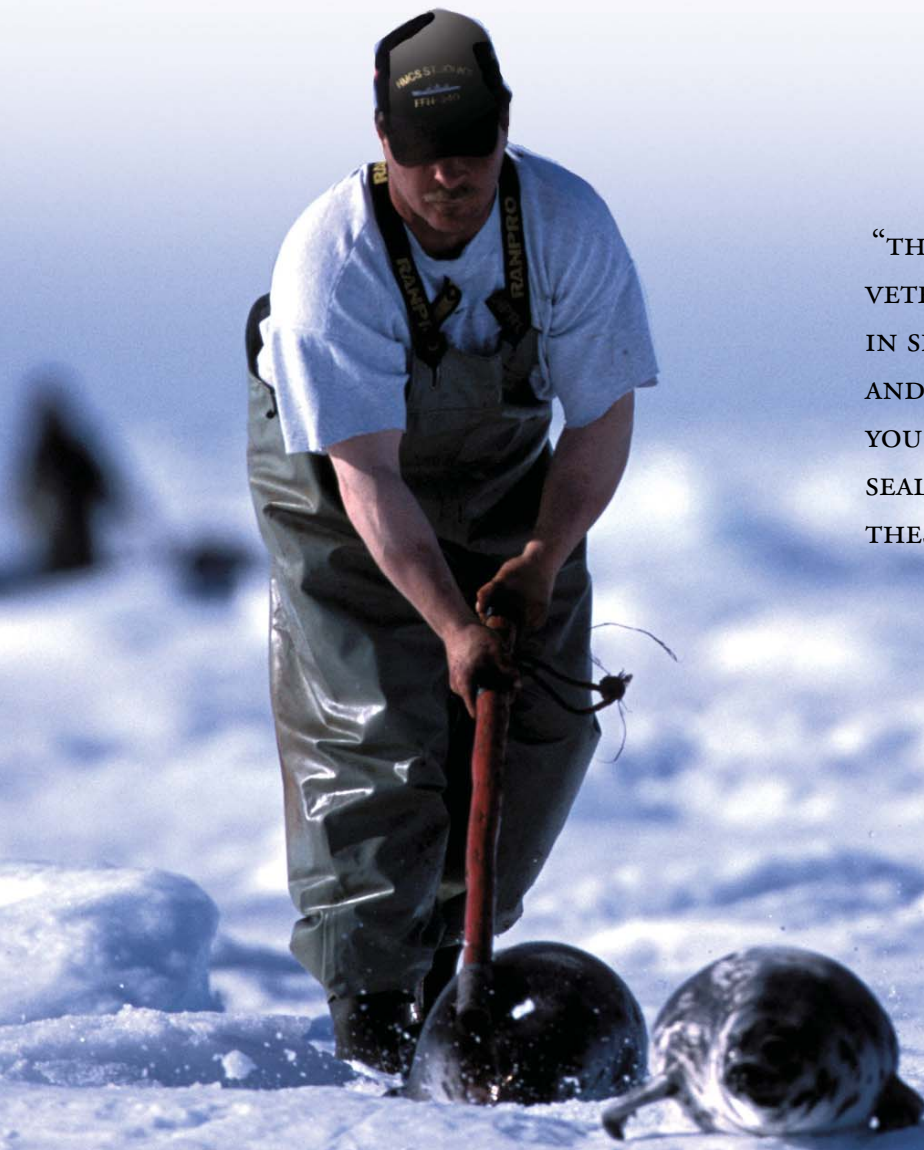
It is IFAW's position that Canada's commercial seal hunt remains unacceptably cruel and contrary to societal norms, both in Canada and in much of the world.

Documentary evidence – in the form of two veterinary reports following the 2001 seal hunt, and video footage of the seal hunt obtained by IFAW in recent years – simply does not support claims by the Canadian government that the hunt is “humane” or “well regulated.”

Seals are routinely clubbed (often with illegal weapons) or shot and left to suffer on the ice, before being clubbed again some time thereafter. Seals are still skinned before being rendered fully unconscious and few sealers are observed checking for a blinking reflex to confirm brain death prior to skinning an animal. As one of the veterinary reports concluded: Canada's commercial seal hunt results in “considerable and unacceptable suffering.”



*Members of an international veterinary team examine seal carcasses during the 2001 hunt.*



“THROUGHOUT MY CAREER AS A VETERINARIAN, I HAVE SEEN ANIMALS DIE IN SLAUGHTERHOUSES, RESEARCH LABS, AND ANIMAL SHELTERS, AND I CAN ASSURE YOU THAT THE CRUELTY EXISTING IN THE SEAL HUNT WOULD NOT BE TOLERATED IN THESE INSTITUTIONS.”

*Dr. Mary Richardson DVM,  
Animal Care Review Board  
Solicitor-General of Ontario  
after observing 1995 hunt*



## 2. Canada's seal hunt is not biologically sustainable.

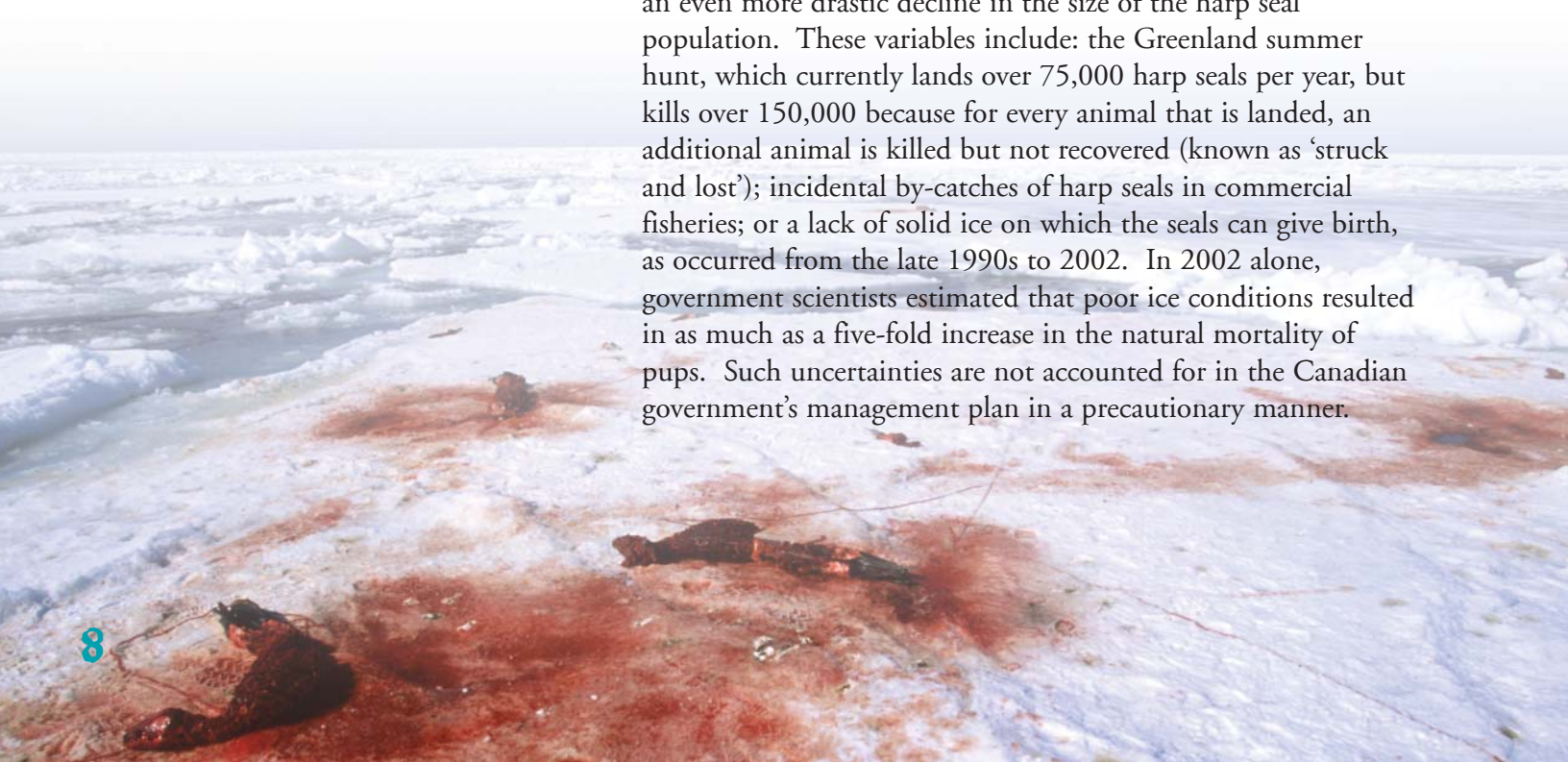
Any pretense of a scientifically based, biologically sustainable hunt has been abandoned and Canada's commercial seal hunt has become – quite simply – a cull, designed more to achieve short-term political objectives than those of a biologically sustainable hunt.

In 1994, then Fisheries Minister Brian Tobin announced that Canada would not consider a return to seal culling. And not so many years ago, the Canadian government argued that its seal hunt was a “sustainable harvest,” based on the “best available science.” The government defined sustainable harvest to mean that the hunt did not reduce the size of the harp seal population from one year to the next. With the introduction of the current management plan in 2003, that all changed.

Today, the Canadian government describes its commercial seal hunt as “market-driven,” with the objective of achieving the maximum economic benefit. The total allowable catch of 975,000 over 3 years – if taken – is intended to reduce the population by 600,000 animals by 2006.

Even if the total allowable catch were reduced to 275,000 after this 3 year period, beginning in 2006 – an unlikely occurrence if there are markets and political pressure to keep the quotas high – government scientists predict that the population will be reduced by 30% (to about 3.85 million animals) by 2011.

Of course, any change in a number of variables could precipitate an even more drastic decline in the size of the harp seal population. These variables include: the Greenland summer hunt, which currently lands over 75,000 harp seals per year, but kills over 150,000 because for every animal that is landed, an additional animal is killed but not recovered (known as ‘struck and lost’); incidental by-catches of harp seals in commercial fisheries; or a lack of solid ice on which the seals can give birth, as occurred from the late 1990s to 2002. In 2002 alone, government scientists estimated that poor ice conditions resulted in as much as a five-fold increase in the natural mortality of pups. Such uncertainties are not accounted for in the Canadian government's management plan in a precautionary manner.



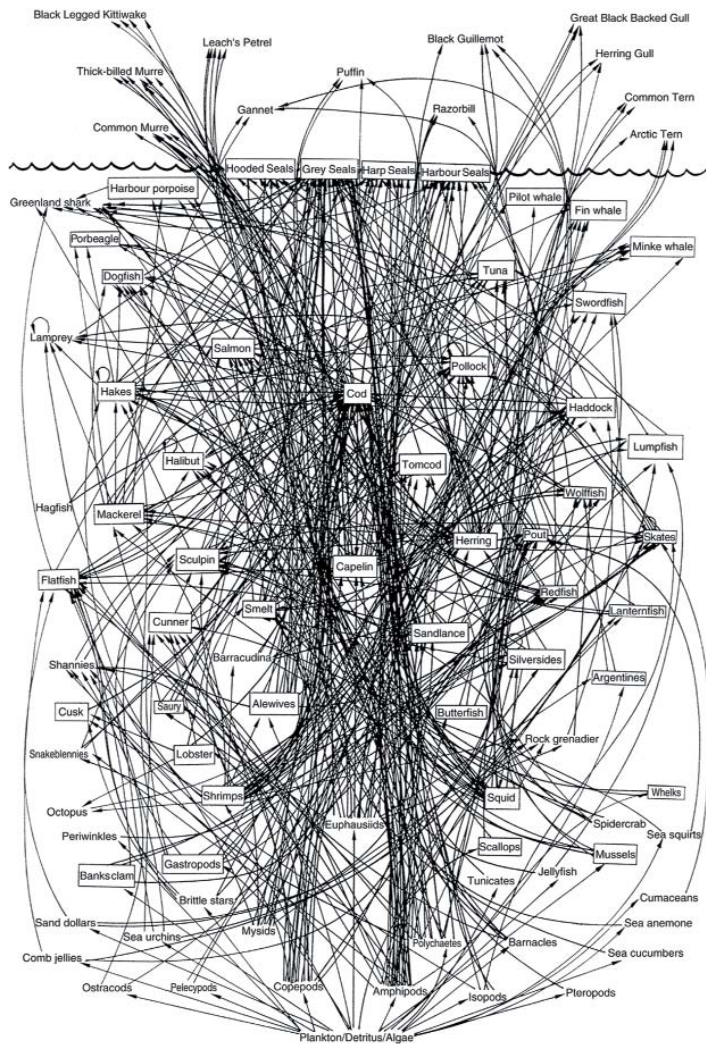
### 3. There is no scientific justification for culling harp seals.

There is no scientific evidence that culling harp seals will benefit commercial fisheries in Atlantic Canada. When the Atlantic cod stocks collapsed in the early 1990s, it was popular to blame seals for “eating all the fish.” Today, scientists – and even most fishermen – agree that seals did not cause the collapse of cod stocks. Quite simply, the cause was overfishing and failures in fisheries management.

Interactions between competitors, predators, and prey in the Northwest Atlantic ecosystem are sufficiently complex – as in the simplified diagram shown here – that a reduction in the size of the harp seal population, or some other predator (or competitor), might actually be detrimental to the recovery of depleted cod stocks.

The Canadian government has initiated a harp seal cull without conducting a proper scientific assessment to determine whether it is likely to achieve any particular objective. The United Nations Environment Programme has produced a protocol for the scientific evaluation of proposals to cull marine mammals for the benefit of fisheries. The Canadian cull falls far short of what is required by the protocol.

Of course, harp seals eat a variety of fish and marine invertebrates, but many of them have no commercial value. Furthermore, there is no scientific evidence that culling harp seals will produce measurable benefits for any fish stock or commercial fishery.



A simplified food web for the Northwest Atlantic.

**THERE IS NO SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE THAT CULLING HARP SEALS WILL PRODUCE MEASURABLE BENEFITS FOR ANY FISH STOCK OR COMMERCIAL FISHERY.**

Client Name / Project Description	Total Government Funding	Public Access	Amount	Year
Atlantic Marine Products Inc. establish a seal processing facility	\$401,240	Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador provide evidence of health benefits of seal oil	\$64,888	2000-11-18
Atlantic Marine Products Inc. explore export opportunities for dressed seal skins	\$65,417	Gateway Maritime Inc. & Canomega Industries Inc. research and develop seal oil products	\$144,842	1999-04-09
Caboto Seafoods Limited marketing development of fully utilized seal products	\$39,258	Carino Company Limited study changing seal oil refinery for food processing	\$4,704	2001-02-17
Carino Company Limited expand an existing seal processing facility	\$180,000	Indian Bay Processors Inc. Establish a facility to process seal meat	\$188,750	2004-08-15
Carino Company Limited conduct a pilot project on value added seal skin processing	\$57,245	Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador study the effects of feeding seal oil to laying hens	\$25,600	2001-01-28

Just a few examples of indirect subsidies to the sealing industry from the Canadian government.

## 4. There is little economic justification for Canada's commercial seal hunt.

By pumping an estimated \$20 million CDN in subsidies into the Atlantic seal hunt in the late 1990s, the Canadian federal government and the provincial government of Newfoundland and Labrador succeeded in increasing the numbers of harp seals killed to levels not seen in the past 30 years. While neither government currently subsidizes the hunt through meat subsidies or other direct payments to sealers, significant amounts of money continue to be spent by governments to upgrade and construct seal processing plants, to promote the seal hunt in Europe and elsewhere, to develop new markets for seal products, and to fund research into the development of new seal products.

In spite of these continuing subsidies, the government claims that Canada's commercial seal hunt is market-driven and economically viable. The fact is, sealing for Atlantic Canada – and for the entire country – is a very small enterprise, accounting for about one-half of one-percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

If anyone were to do proper accounting – including the costs of management and research, the governments' costs to promote the hunt, the cost to Canada's reputation abroad, etc. – they would likely find that the hunt actually costs the Canadian taxpayer money. Despite years of research into developing new products, the only economically valuable part of the seal is its fur, a non-essential luxury product that no one really needs. Today most of the harp seal carcasses (including the meat) are simply left on the ice once the pelt and blubber are removed.

*The landed value of the 2004 hunt in Newfoundland and Labrador (the province that accounts for more than 90% of the landed catch) is reported to be \$14,830,019. Total value of the Newfoundland fishery (all species) for 2004 is reported as \$595,794,681.*

### What is a seal 'worth?'

Ragged jacket pelt \$16		Adult penis \$15	
Beater pelt \$48		Seal fat \$0.44 / kg	
Adult pelt \$7		Seal meat \$0.74 / kg	

Average landed values in 2004. All values in \$CDN. Source: Fisheries and Oceans Canada

## 5. The Canadian government's management plan is not precautionary

Canada still does not take a precautionary approach to its management of the sealing activities off its East coast. Canada's risky, politically-driven approach to natural resources management contributed greatly to the collapse of cod and other fish stocks off Canada's East coast in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The evidence is that Canada has learned little from the past. Its current management plan for harp seals is but one more manifestation of that persistent problem.

Superficially, the Canadian government's management plan might look like it is based on a precautionary approach. It contains words like "conservation [and] precautionary reference points," and "control rules," among other language usually found in precautionary management plans. Yet, viewed more closely, it becomes quite evident that the plan does NOT even begin to satisfy modern conservation standards of precaution.

While this is a technical issue and beyond the scope of this booklet, suffice it to say that the management plan does not adequately account either for scientific uncertainty or for environmental uncertainty.

Essentially, the approach is to assume that:

- the environment will remain constant (inconceivable),
- that the scientists' numbers are completely correct (unrealistic), and
- that nothing else will change in the future (impossible).

There is blind faith that if something does go wrong, it will be noticed in time. It's rather like constructing a bridge without first doing the calculations to make sure that it won't fall down, and hoping that if there is a problem, someone will spot the cracks before it is too late.

Why is precaution so vital when attempting to manage a large-scale commercial hunt such as that for harp seals? The history of wildlife conservation has shown that when large mammals like seals have a price placed on their heads – or hides – the end result is almost always overexploitation.



### Characteristics of animals most likely to become endangered by human activities

	Harp seal
Large predators	✓
Long gestation period, few offspring per litter	✓
Congregate in large numbers to reproduce	✓
Migrate across international boundaries	✓
Hunted for commerce, but not subject to effective management	✓

Source: Ehrenfeld 1970.

# Questions and Answers about the Seal Hunt

## How old are harp seals when they are killed?

In recent years, about 95% of the harp seals killed have been pups between the ages of about 2 weeks and 3 months.

It is legal to kill harp seal pups once they have begun to moult their white pelts, beginning at about 12 days of age. The killing of whitecoat seals is prohibited, and so is the sale of their pelts. In 2004, 96.6% of the seals killed were pups between 2 weeks and 3 months of age.

## How are the seals killed?

Early in the season, younger seals are usually killed on the ice with clubs or hakapiks. Later in the season, beaters and older seals are usually shot with a rifle, both on the ice and in the water. It is also legal to use a shotgun firing slugs.



*A hakapik, a legal weapon for killing seals.*

## How much does a sealing licence cost?

A licence to hunt harp and hooded seals off eastern Canada costs \$5 (CDN). In comparison, a permit to watch someone else kill seals costs \$25.00 and requires a background check by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

## How many sealers are there?

The number of sealers that actually go sealing is much smaller than the number who hold licences. In 2001, Tina Fagan, then the Executive Director of the Canadian Sealers Association, stated that there were about 11,000 licensed sealers in Newfoundland, with only about 2,500 active in any given year.

If sealers do not renew their licence in any given year, they may not be eligible for a licence the following year. Thus there will always be more sealing licences sold than there are active sealers.

## What is the market for seal pelts?

In recent years, the majority of harp seal pelts have been exported in the raw state to Norway for further processing (see table below). Tracking trade in processed pelts and finished products is a more difficult proposition.

Exports of Canadian raw seal pelts (values in \$CDN)

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Norway	1,260,555	380,017	-	3,046,648	5,998,388
Denmark	54,978	-	389,853	749,155	562,625
Poland	-	-	-	236,866	421,500
China	869,343	152,149	-	28,510	207,933
South Korea	-	-	-	-	29,981
Ukraine	-	-	-	-	24,367
Germany	-	-	86,270	-	11,390
Taiwan	-	-	-	-	410
Finland	-	-	-	-	300
Estonia	-	-	-	245,737	-
Japan	-	-	-	11,434	-
Greece	-	-	53	6,799	-
Hong Kong	33,290	16,590	-	155	-
Italy	-	-	76,454	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,218,166</b>	<b>548,756</b>	<b>552,630</b>	<b>4,325,304</b>	<b>7,256,894</b>

Source: Industry Canada (Strategis)

## Do harp seals eat Atlantic cod?

Yes, Atlantic cod (*Gadus morhua*) represent a small part - usually estimated to be 3% or less - of the harp seal's annual diet. Atlantic cod are not, however, consumed throughout the entire year, but rather in certain places at certain times of the year. Canadian government scientists have recently lowered their estimates of seal predation on cod in the northern Gulf of St. Lawrence. Most of the harp seal's annual diet is comprised of smaller, fatty fishes, like capelin (*Mallotus villosus*) and Arctic cod (*Boreogadus saida*) and a variety of small shrimp-like organisms including mysids and euphausiids.

## Does the harp seal's consumption of Atlantic cod have serious impacts on cod abundance?

The proper answer to the question is "we do not know." According to a recent paper by two Canadian government scientists, "it will not be possible to assess the relative impact of seal predation on fish stock abundance until other sources of natural mortality are quantified." In short, there is no evidence to support the frequent claims that harp seal are impeding the recovery of cod.

## Is the commercial harp seal hunt important to First Nations and Inuit peoples in Canada?

Most seal hunting by First Nations and Inuit peoples occurs before and after Canada's commercial seal hunt. A small number of harp seals are taken by First Nations peoples during the southern and northern migrations of harp seals along the Labrador coast, in the autumn and spring, respectively. Similarly, the Inuit hunt small numbers of harp seals during the summer months in the eastern Canadian Arctic. However, they are primarily interested in "the seal," which for them is the small Arctic ringed seal (*Pusa hispida*).

So, when we are talking about Canada's commercial seal hunt, we are not talking about traditional subsistence hunts by First Nations and Inuit peoples, which occur in other places and at other times of the year.

For the record, IFAW does not oppose the hunting of wild animals (including seals) by First Nations or Inuit peoples for subsistence purposes, provided that such hunting is conducted on a sustainable basis, and that reasonable precautions are taken to minimize unnecessary pain and suffering of the animals affected.

Recently, a cynical internal Canadian government memo advised the government to "play the Nunavut Inuit card as leverage to open the door to obtaining a waiver [to the U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act, which prohibits the importation of seal products] and have the east coast [Newfoundland] sealers follow." This is further evidence that a 20 year old Canadian government policy to use First Nations and Inuit peoples to rationalize the southern Canadian commercial seal hunt is still in effect.

## How many seals are killed in the other harp seal hunts?

The Northwest Atlantic harp seal population that is hunted off eastern Canada in the spring is also hunted off West Greenland during the summer in an unregulated and highly subsidized hunt (See Appendix 2). In recent years that hunt has reportedly landed over 90,000 harp seals, meaning that some 180,000 animals were actually killed. In 2001, the last year for which there are data, the landed catch had dropped to 76,610 harp seals (and 4,820 hooded seals).

As we noted in the introduction (p. 1) there are two other harp seal populations in the North Atlantic and both are still hunted. In 2003, the last year for which we have data, 2,277 harp seals (and 5,283 hooded seals) were landed on the "West Ice" off the island of Jan Mayen.

An additional 2,240 harp seals (and 1,439 hooded seals) were reportedly landed in Southeast Greenland in 2001. Another 71 harps (and 5 hoods) were reported landed in Northeast Greenland.

In the White Sea, off the coast of Russia, 43,234 harp seals were landed in 2003, again the last year for which we have data.

For additional landed catch statistics from harp seal populations in the Northwest Atlantic, off the East coast of Greenland near Jan Mayen, and in the White Sea off the coast of Russia, see Appendices 1-4. Keep in mind that the landed catch statistics do not include the numbers of seals that are killed by hunters but are not landed (animals struck and lost); as a consequence, the total numbers of seals killed will always be higher than those reported in the landed catch statistics.

## “Politics is the father of lies.”

Anyone interested in learning the facts about Canada’s seal hunt – including the general public or the media – may be easily misled by the rhetoric presented by the various participants in the controversy. For decades, Canadian politicians and bureaucrats have been among the most prominent disseminators of misinformation on Canada’s seal hunt.

The most recent examples come from David Bevan, as Assistant Deputy Minister, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, in letters published in Canada’s *National Post* (Fri. 7 January 2005) and *The Vancouver Sun* (14 January 2005). Below, we compare some of Mr. Bevan’s claims with the documented facts surrounding Canada’s commercial seal hunt. Doubting readers are encouraged to check the facts for themselves.

**David Bevan, Fisheries and Oceans:** “The seals hunted are fully mature, independent animals. Hunting for harp and hooded seal pups is strictly prohibited.”

**Fact:** Canada’s commercial seal hunt targets pups (young of the year), primarily weaned ragged jackets (pups aged 2-3 weeks that are moulting their white coats) and beaters (fully moulted pups, under the age of 3 months). In the 2004 hunt, Bevan’s own department reports that 96.6% of the harp seal catch was comprised of pups under the age of about 3 months, many of whom would not have even begun to eat on their own at the time of their death. Since harp seals currently do not reach sexual maturity until the age of about 5-6 years, calling these pups “fully mature” goes far beyond simply being economical with the truth.

**David Bevan:** “Mature seals are killed quickly, according to strict regulations that prevent any inhumane treatment. Canada’s seal-hunting methods have been studied and approved by the Royal Commission on Seals and Sealing and the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association [CVMA]. Both independent studies found that the methods used in the seal hunt are humane...”

**Fact:** As noted above, mature seals actually accounted for less than 4% of last year’s hunt. Regardless, video evidence obtained by IFAW from Canada’s commercial seal hunt shows clearly that the “strict regulations” Mr. Bevan refers to do not “prevent any inhumane treatment.” Further, the second report he refers to above, which was published in the *Canadian Veterinary Journal* in 2002, actually carries the disclaimer: “*The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not constitute an official position of the CVMA.*” Mr. Bevan also fails to mention a second veterinary report produced by a team of five international veterinarians, after observing the 2001 seal hunt. Both reports

document numerous instances where seals were clubbed with illegal instruments and treated in ways that appear entirely inconsistent with Canada’s Marine Mammal Regulations. As well, the authors of *both* studies reported instances where animals were not rendered unconscious prior to hooking or skinning. Clearly, the regulations to which Mr. Bevan refers fail to “prevent any inhumane treatment.” Videotape obtained from the 2004 hunt indicates that cruel practices, including leaving clubbed and severely injured seals alive to suffer for periods of an hour or more, continue to occur.

**David Bevan:** “The Canadian seal hunt is a sustainable, economically viable activity...The federal government does not subsidize the sealing industry.”

**Facts:** These days the word “sustainable” can mean virtually anything. Not so many years ago, however, Mr. Bevan’s Department of Fisheries and Oceans defined a sustainable seal hunt as one that did not cause the seal population to decline from one year to the next. Today, the government’s management plan is actually designed to reduce the population. Quotas are intentionally set above the government’s estimated replacement yield in order to reduce the size of the seal population. In short, the current management plan is not even intended to achieve the government’s own definition of a sustainable hunt.

From 1995 to 2000, both the federal government and the provincial government of Newfoundland and Labrador provided direct subsidies to Canada’s sealing industry. While these subsidies were phased out, other less obvious subsidies continue, including the recent funding of a seal processing plant in Quebec. Other recent examples of subsidies to the sealing industry are shown on page 10. Mr. Bevan is wrong to claim that the federal government “does not subsidize the sealing industry.”

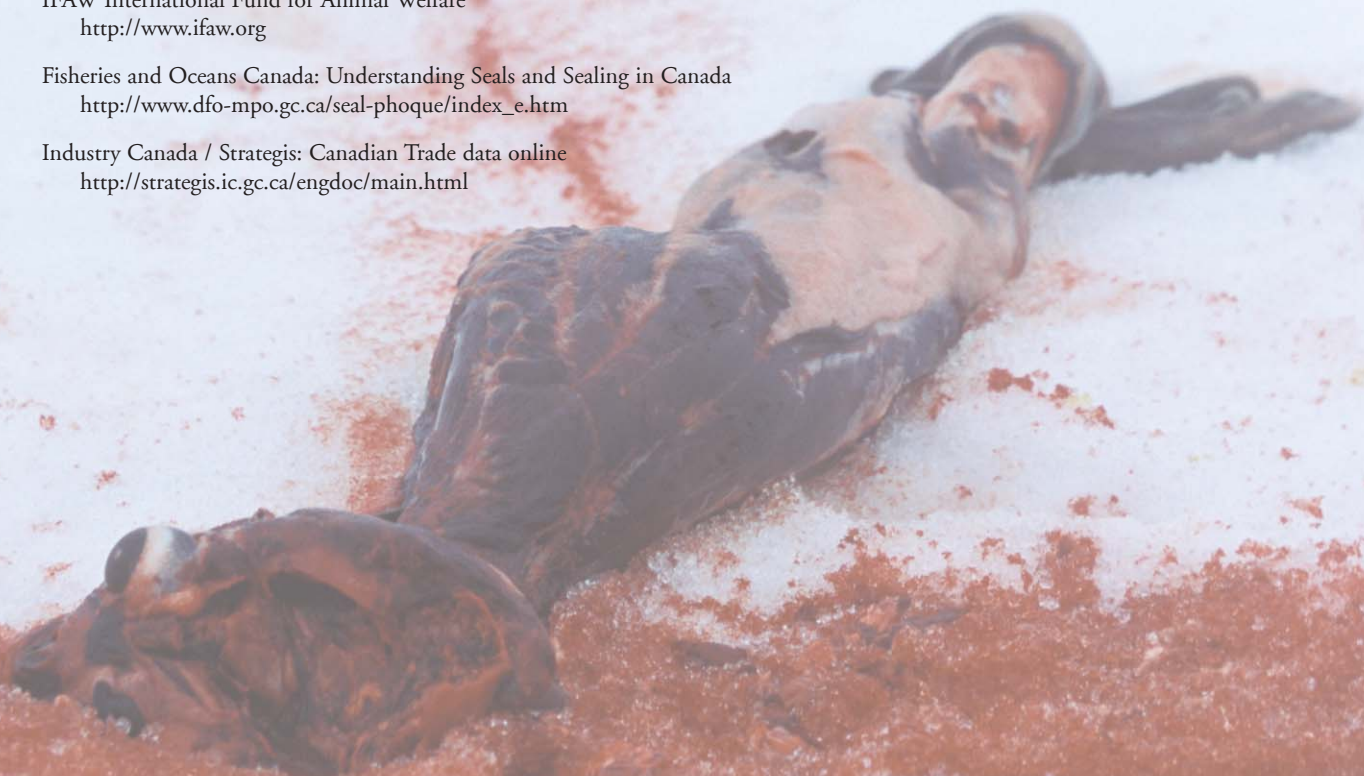
There are no recent economic analyses to substantiate Mr. Bevan’s claim that the seal hunt is an “economically viable activity.” The evidence that does exist suggests that the seal hunt makes a trivial contribution (less than half of one percent) to the Gross Domestic Product of Newfoundland. If one were to deduct the known subsidies, the costs of ice-breakers to help sealers gain access to the seals, the various costs associated with “managing” the seal hunt, the costs associated with Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs’ missions to Europe and elsewhere to promote the hunt, and the economic impacts of the negative international reactions to Canada’s seal hunt, one would likely find that the hunt results in a net economic drain on Canada’s economy.

## Suggested Readings

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- Bevan, D. 2005. The 'quick and efficient' death of a seal. Letter to the Editor, *National Post*. 07 January 2005.
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- Lavigne, D.M. 2003. Marine Mammals and Fisheries: The Role of Science in the Culling Debate. Pp 31-47. In: *Marine Mammals: Fisheries, Tourism and Management Issues* (N. Gales, M. Hindell and R. Kirkwood eds.). Collingwood, VIC, Australia: CSIRO Publishing. 446 pp.
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- Lavigne, D.M and Kit M. Kovacs. 1988. Harps and Hoods, Ice-breeding seals of the Northwest Atlantic. University of Waterloo Press, Waterloo. 178 pp.

## Websites

- IFAW International Fund for Animal Welfare  
<http://www.ifaw.org>
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada: Understanding Seals and Sealing in Canada  
[http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/seal-phoque/index\\_e.htm](http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/seal-phoque/index_e.htm)
- Industry Canada / Strategis: Canadian Trade data online  
<http://strategis.ic.gc.ca/engdoc/main.html>



## Appendix 1

# Quotas and landed catches of harp seals in Canada

	Quota	Landed Catch			% Pups
		Pups	1+	Total	
1971	245,000	210,579	20,387	230,966	91
1972	150,000	116,810	13,073	129,883	90
1973	150,000	98,335	25,497	123,832	79
1974	150,000	114,825	32,810	147,635	78
1975	150,000	140,638	33,725	174,363	81
1976	127,000	132,085	32,917	165,002	80
1977	170,000	126,982	28,161	155,143	82
1978	170,000	116,190	45,533	161,723	72
1979	170,000	132,458	28,083	160,541	83
1980	170,000	132,421	37,105	169,526	78
1981	170,000	178,394	23,775	202,169	88
1982	186,000	145,274	21,465	166,739	87
1983	186,000	50,058	7,831	57,889	86
1984	186,000	23,922	7,622	31,544	77
1985	186,000	13,334	5,701	19,035	70
1986	186,000	21,888	4,046	25,934	84
1987	186,000	36,350	10,446	46,796	76
1988	186,000	66,972	27,074	94,046	83
1989	186,000	56,346	8,958	65,304	91
1990	186,000	34,402	25,760	60,162	60
1991	186,000	42,382	10,206	52,588	88
1992	186,000	43,866	24,802	68,668	64
1993	186,000	16,401	10,602	27,003	61
1994	186,000	25,223	36,156	61,379	35
1995	186,000	34,106	31,661	65,767	53
1996	250,000	184,856	58,050	242,906	75
1997	275,000	220,476	43,734	264,210	84
1998	275,000	?	?	282,624	?
1999	275,000	?	?	244,603	?
2000	275,000	85,485	6,583	92,068	93
2001	275,000	214,754	11,739	226,493	95
2002	275,000	297,764	14,603	312,367	95
2003	289,512	280,174	9,338	289,512	97
2004	350,000	353,553	12,418	365,971	97
2005	319,500				

Source: ICES / NAFO 2004

## Appendix 2

### Landed catches of harp seals in West Greenland

Year	Landed Catch
1997	68313
1998	80712
1999	91399
2000	96092
2001	76610

Source: ICES / NAFO 2004

## Appendix 3

### Landed catches of harp seals on the West Ice

	Norwegian Catch			Russian Catch			Total Catch		
	pups	1+	total	pups	1+	total	pups	1+	total
1990	26	5482	5508	0	784	784	26	6266	6292
1991	0	4867	4867	500	1328	1828	500	6195	6695
1992	0	7750	7750	590	1293	1883	590	9043	9633
1993	0	3520	3520	-	-	-	0	3520	3520
1994	0	8121	8121	0	72	72	0	8193	8193
1995	317	7889	8206	-	-	-	317	7889	8206
1996	5649	778	6427	-	-	-	5649	778	6427
1997	1962	199	2161	-	-	-	1962	199	2161
1998	1707	177	1884	-	-	-	1707	177	1884
1999	608	195	803	-	-	-	608	195	803
2000	6328	6015	12343	-	-	-	6328	6015	12343
2001	2267	725	2992	-	-	-	2267	725	2992
2002	1118	114	1232	-	-	-	1118	114	1232
2003	161	2116	2277	-	-	-	161	2116	2277

Source: ICES / NAFO 2004

## Appendix 4

### Landed catches of harp seals on the East Ice (White and Barents Seas)

	Nowegian Catch			Russian Catch			Total Catch		
	pups	1+	total	pups	1+	total	pups	1+	total
1990	0	9522	9522	30500	1957	32457	30500	11479	41979
1991	0	9500	9500	30500	1980	32480	30500	11480	41980
1992	0	5571	5571	28351	2739	31090	28351	8310	36661
1993	0	8758	8758	31000	500	31500	31000	9258	40258
1994	0	9500	9500	30500	2000	32500	30500	11500	42000
1995	260	6582	6842	29144	500	29644	29404	7082	36486
1996	2910	6611	9521	31000	528	31528	33910	7139	41049
1997	15	5004	5019	31319	61	31380	31334	5065	36399
1998	18	814	832	13350	20	13370	13368	834	14202
1999	173	977	1150	34850	0	34850	35023	977	36000
2000	2253	4104	6357	38302	111	38413	40555	4215	44770
2001	330	4870	5200	39111	5	39116	39441	4875	44316
2002	411	1937	2348	34187	0	34187	34598	1937	36535
2003	2343	2955	5298	37936	0	37936	40279	2955	43234

Source: ICES / NAFO 2004



International Fund for Animal Welfare

Offices in Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, France,  
Germany, India, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, Netherlands, Russia,  
South Africa, United Kingdom

