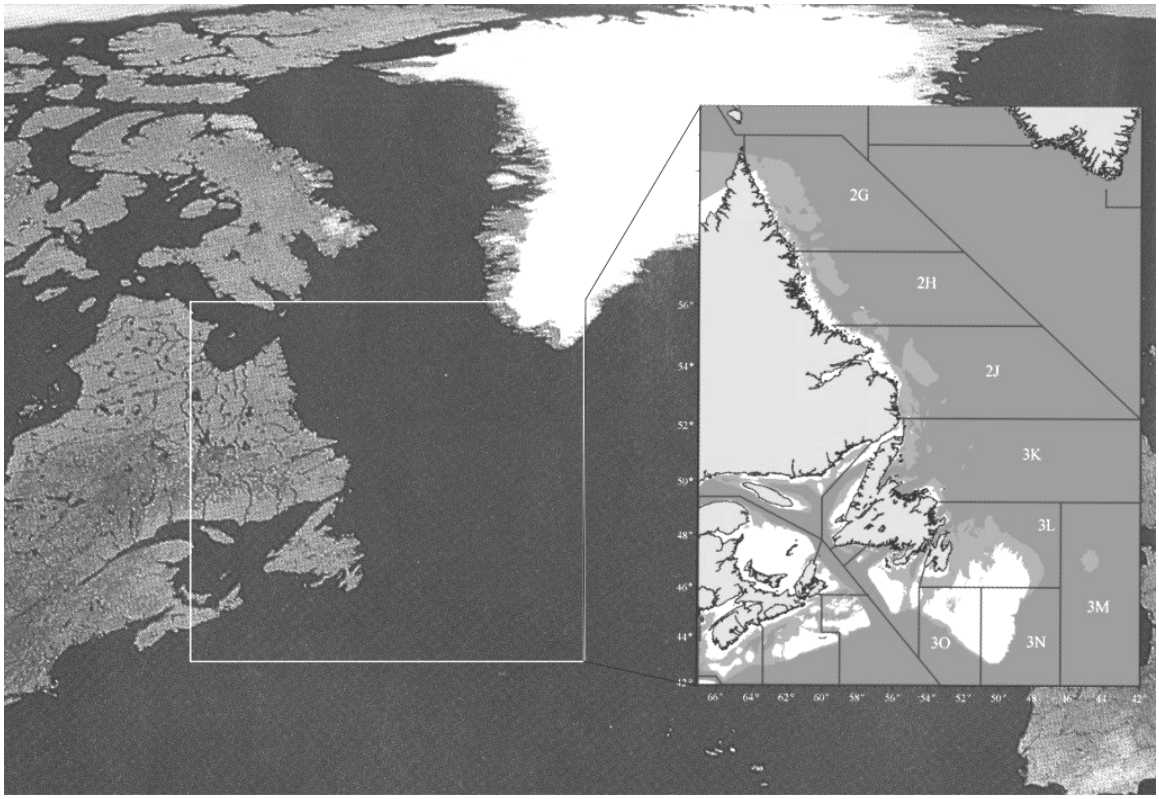
Atlantic Seal Hunt
2003-2005
Management Plan



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1. THE 2003-2005 ATLANTIC SEAL HUNT AT A GLANCE

On February 3, 2003, Minister Thibault announced a new multi-year Atlantic Seal Hunt Management Plan (2003-2005).

Seal management is founded on sound conservation principles to ensure harvest opportunities at the present time and in the future – and for the duration of this plan, the Department is adopting an Objective-Based Fisheries Management (OBFM) approach. See Section 1.2 for a full description of OBFM.

The report of the Eminent Panel on Seal Management, along with consultations with more than 100 stake-holders at the 2002 Seal Forum in St. John's, greatly assisted in the development of this plan.

1.1 HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 2003-2005 MANAGEMENT PLAN

1.1.1 Total Allowable Catch (TAC)

Harp Seals – 975,000 over three years with an annual TAC up to 350,000 in any two years provided that the combined TAC over three years is maintained by a reduction in the TAC in the other years.

Hooded Seals – The TAC remains at 10,000 per year. As in previous years, there will be no hunt of hooded seals in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Grey Seals – A small harvest of grey seals is allowed in areas other than Sable Island.

Ringed, Harbour and Bearded Seals – There are no TACs or allocations set on these species. Licenses and permits are used to control any commercial harvest of these seals.

1.1.2 Amendments to the *Marine Mammal Regulations*

On March 19, 2003, following extensive public consultations, regulatory amendments governing the seal hunt were approved by the Special Committee of Council (SCC). The regulations were registered on March 20, 2003 and published in the *Canada Gazette* on April 9, 2003. These Regulations are now in force. The amendments can be found under Statutory Order or Regulations (SOR) number: SOR/2003-103.

The purpose of the amendments is to improve the effectiveness and relevancy of the *Marine Mammal Regulations* as they apply to commercial and non-aboriginal sealing and to provide consistency with existing policies. See Section 7.1 for a full description of the amendments.

1.1.3 Other Plan Elements

The harvest of harp seals at the whitecoat stage and hooded seals at the blueback stage is prohibited.

Persons may not hunt adult seals in breeding or whelping patches.

Land-based sealers and sealers using vessels less than 65' in length will do the hunting, although vessels beyond that length may be considered for use to collect, transport and prepare hunted seals from small vessels and as safe havens for sealers in bad weather.

DFO enforces regulatory requirements for the firearms, ammunition, clubs and hakapiks used in sealing to ensure the right tools are used properly for the quick and humane dispatch of animals.

1.2 OBJECTIVE-BASED FISHERIES MANAGEMENT (OBFM)

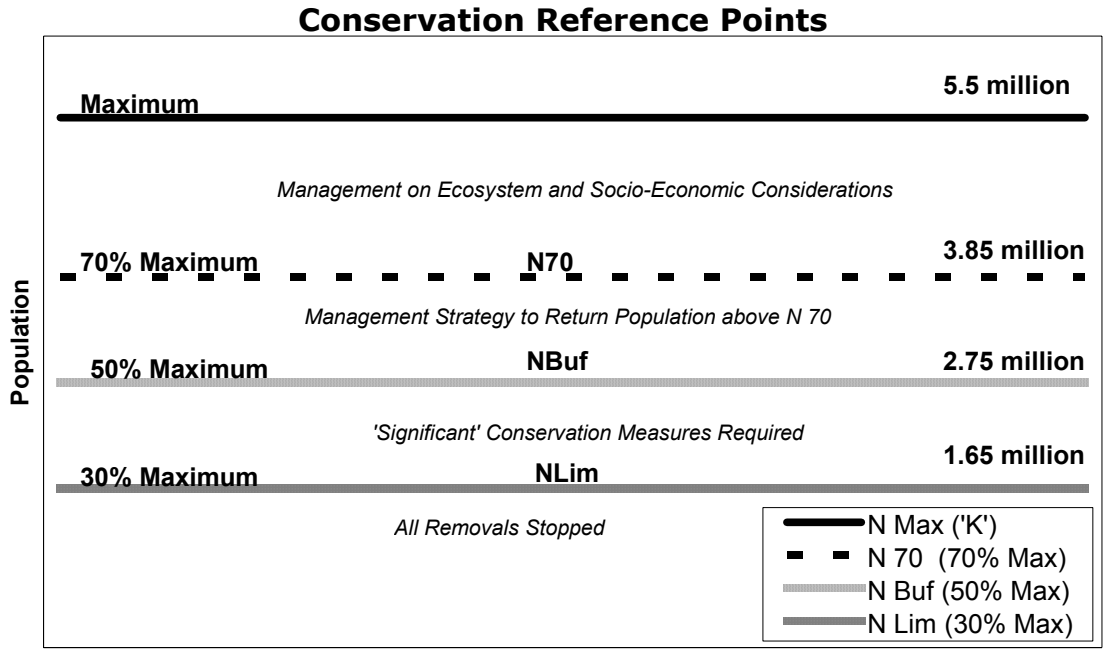
The Department is adopting an Objective-Based Fisheries Management (OBFM) approach for harp seals. This management model uses control rules and reference points to establish management measures for a fishery.

Reference points, are pre-established population levels that trigger specific management actions when they are reached. **Control rules** are specific, pre-established actions that are triggered at certain reference points. Control rules include measures such as a lower TAC, changes to season length and area closures.

Reference points have been set at 70%, 50% and 30% of 5.5 million, the maximum observed size of the harp seal herd.

If market conditions result in the full TAC being taken for the three-year plan, it is estimated the population would decline to about 4.7 million by 2006 – well above the 70% threshold. The Department is committed to maintaining the population above the 70% reference point.

Where there is an abundant resource, OBFM will facilitate a market-driven harvest that will enable sealers to maximize their benefits without compromising conservation.



The harp seal population has nearly tripled in size – less than two million in the 1970s to more than five million today. The Department believes that some reduction in the population is possible at this time while maintaining the principle of sustainable use of this natural resource.

The OBFM approach was explained and generally accepted at the 2002 Seal Forum. The adoption of the OBFM framework for harp seals features:

- more flexible management measures to facilitate a market-based harvest that would not reduce the population below the level of 70% (3.85 million) of its highest known abundance (5.5 million);
- more stringent management measures that would have at least a 80% chance to bringing the population back above that 70% level in the event that it falls below 3.85 million animals;
- very stringent management measures including a closure of much, if not all, of the commercial seal hunt in the event that the population falls below 50% (2.75 million) of its highest known abundance; and
- closure to all seal hunting if the population drops to the level of 30% (1.65 million) of its highest known abundance.

The Department plans to use OBFM for hooded and grey seals after new surveys are completed on their populations. The lack of recent survey data for hooded seals and lower populations for hooded and grey

seals does not permit the use of an OBFM framework for these two species. The participants at the 2002 Seal Forum generally accepted the approach of considering these species 'Data Poor' and adopting conservative management measures due to the high level of uncertainty present.

2. BACKGROUND

The Northwest Atlantic harp seal (*Pagophilus groenlandica*) is the most abundant of all seal species in Atlantic Canada and accounts for most of the harvest.

Although harp seals have been hunted commercially since the 16th Century, the present day Atlantic coast commercial seal hunt took shape in the late 1980s after the collapse of the large-vessel hunt for whitecoat harp seals.

In 1987, following the report of the *Royal Commission on Seals and Sealing in Canada* (the Malouf report), the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans announced prohibitions on:

- the use of vessels over 65 feet (19.8 metres) in length;
- the commercial hunt of whitecoats (harp seals that have not begun to moult, which occurs at about 10 to 14 days of age); and
- the commercial hunt of bluebacks (hooded seals that have not begun to moult, which occurs at about 15 to 16 months of age).

In February 1993, the *Marine Mammal Regulations* were established to replace several sets of regulations. These regulations included the current prohibition on the sale, trade or barter of whitecoats and bluebacks.

The commercial hunt is now carried out using longliners (vessels 35'-65' in length) or small boats (vessels under 35' in length). Where there is solid ice and seals are close to shore, sealers may hunt on foot or using snowmobiles. The hunt provides important seasonal income and food to residents of small coastal communities where there have been fisheries closures and employment opportunities are limited.

Since 1995, a policy change allows residents adjacent to sealing areas throughout Newfoundland and Quebec to hunt up to six seals for their own use. Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal coastal residents who reside north of 53°N latitude can continue to hunt seals for subsistence purposes without a licence.

3. OVERVIEW OF THE ATLANTIC SEAL HUNT

3.1 SPECIES HUNTED

Six species of seals — the harp, hooded, grey, ringed, bearded and harbour — are found off the Atlantic coast of Canada, although ringed and bearded seals are typically Arctic species. Of the six species, harp and hooded seals account for almost all the seals hunted commercially. A number of grey seals are also taken for commercial uses under licences issued for that purpose.

3.1.1 Harp Seals

There are three populations of this abundant species, of which the northwest Atlantic stock off Canada is the largest. The others are the White Sea population and the Jan Mayen or Greenland Sea population. The most recent estimate of the northwest harp seal population is 5.2 million animals (1999).

In addition to subsistence hunts in the Canadian Arctic and Greenland, harp seals are harvested commercially in the Gulf of St Lawrence and off the coast of northeast Newfoundland and Labrador. Harp seals are also known to taken as incidental catches in a number of fisheries, particularly the lumpfish fishery in Newfoundland.

3.1.2 Hooded Seals

There are two stocks of hooded seals: one in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the other off Newfoundland. The Gulf herd is very small and no hunting of this stock has been allowed for years. Only 500 hooded seals have been taken in Canada since 1999 and the Greenland harvest has not changed appreciably.

The last hooded seal survey in 1990 provided a population estimate of approximately 470,000 animals.

Apart from the commercial hunt, some seals of all species are taken in subsistence hunts in Labrador, northern Quebec and Nunavut. Some harp and hooded seals are taken for personal use by residents adjacent to sealing areas.

3.2 PARTICIPANTS

In recent years, commercial licences issued to sealers averaged 11,000 per year. With improving markets and record high prices paid for seal pelts, in 2002, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) issued over 12,000 **commercial sealing licences**. The Department does not collect information on how many of these licences are actually used in any given year.

Table 1 shows a breakdown by licences issued. Most commercial sealers engage in fishing for other species or have economic ties to the fishing industry. Groundfish fishery closures have increased the relative importance of sealing as a source of livelihood.

TABLE 1
NUMBER OF SEAL LICENCES ISSUED IN 2002

PROVINCE	Professional	Assistant	Personal Use	TOTAL	# of vessels > 35'
Newfoundland and Labrador	7,200	3,788	1,235	12,223	705
Quebec	1,455	194	526	2,175	60
Nova Scotia	1	20		21	
Prince Edward Island	12	4		16	8
TOTAL	**8,668**	**4,006**	**1,761**	**14,435**	**773**

As noted above, residents of Labrador north of 53°N latitude do not need a licence to hunt seals for subsistence purposes.

Since 1995, **personal use sealing licences** have been issued to residents adjacent to sealing areas in Newfoundland and Labrador (south of 53°N latitude), the Quebec North Shore, the Gaspé Peninsula and the Magdalen Islands. These are areas hard-hit by the groundfish fishery closures. This type of licence allows the holder to take up to six seals for personal consumption.

3.3 LOCATION OF THE HUNT

The Northwest Atlantic breeding stock of harp seals spend the summer in the Canadian Arctic and Greenland. They begin their southward migration in early fall and by late November reach the southern Labrador coast. From here, about a third of the mature seals enter the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the rest migrate southwards along the east coast of Newfoundland.

Although the movement of ice floes and ice conditions often determine the degree of effort in any given area, the majority of the seal hunt occurs on the Front, an area off the north and east coasts of Newfoundland and off southern Labrador (see Figure 1 for seal migration patterns).

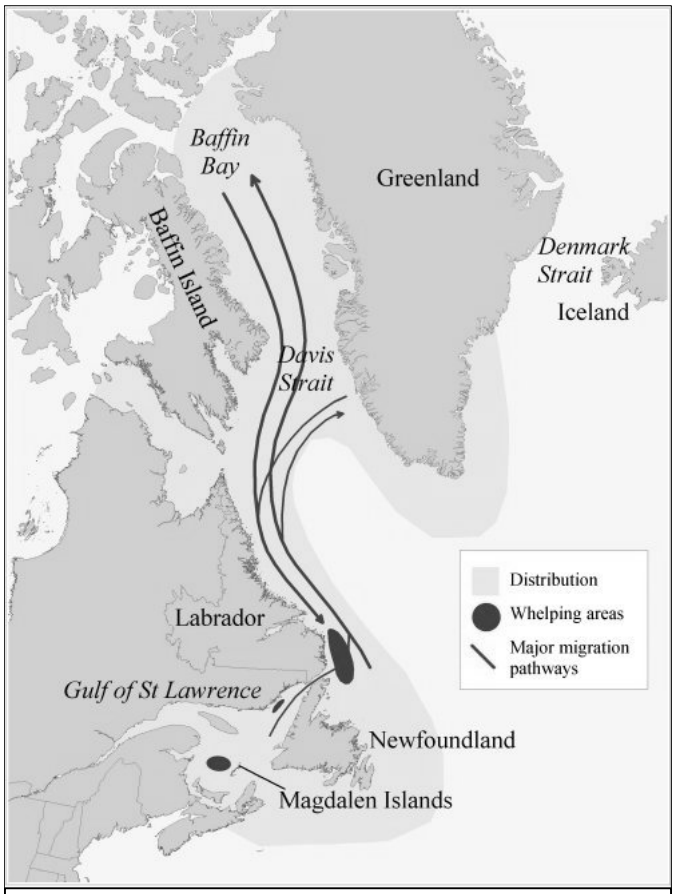


Figure 1 – Harp Seal Migration Pattern

In 2002, almost all hunting activity took place in the Front. Ice conditions in the Gulf were not conducive to fishing as most of the ice melted ahead of time, also resulting in increased natural mortality of seal pups – perhaps as much as five times the normal. About 75% of the harp seal pups are born in the Front, where ice conditions were normal.

3.4 TIMEFRAME OF THE HUNT

The season for the commercial hunt of harp and hooded seals is from November 15 to May 15 as established in the *Marine Mammal Regulations*, although this can be altered by a Variation Order to deal with circumstances that may arise.

The majority of sealing occurs between early March and May, beginning around the second week in March off the Magdalen Islands, and about the second week in April off Newfoundland. The timing of hunt activities in the Gulf of St. Lawrence depends largely on the movement of ice floes on which seals are located. The peak commercial hunt in this area is in March, although sealing does occur along the Quebec North Shore in January and February.

In 2002, the season for harp and hooded seals was scheduled to close on May 15, 2002 but the Department authorized a season extension until May 31, 2002 for those groups that had not reached their allocation. The hunt was closed for all groups on May 31, 2002 and approximately 312,000 harp seals were taken.

As in previous years, the Canadian Sealers Association and industry requested that the opening date for the harp seal harvest in Sealing Areas 5, 6, 7 and 8 be postponed from March 25, to April 8, 2002. (See map on Section 15). This request was made to improve the quality of the pelts in allowing the ragged-jacket harp seals to become more mature beaters before being harvested. This request was granted and variation orders closing these areas were issued. Because of different rates of maturity, the seal hunt was allowed to continue in the Gulf during the closed time for the Front.

The season for the subsistence hunt of ringed seals in Labrador is from April 25 to November 30 as established in the *Marine Mammal Regulations*.

The grey seal hunt is set by Variation Order to reflect the presence of seals and the hunt is further controlled by conditions set out in the licences given for this activity.

3.5 LANDINGS

3.5.1 Harp Seals

The nature of the present Atlantic coast commercial hunt for harp seals took shape in the late 1980s after the collapse of the historic European markets for whitecoat and blueback pelts. From 1983 to 1995, the average annual harp seal harvest was 51,000 despite a TAC of 186,000 animals.

As shown in Figure 2, the hunt levels for harp seals were much higher before the market collapsed. High catch levels reduced the population to a level of less than two million in the early 1970s. The harp seal population is now around 5.2 million.

After 1995, the market for sealskins improved and in 1996, based upon new scientific information, the TAC for harp seals was raised to 250,000. The TAC was further increased to 275,000 in 1997, which was within the estimates of ***replacement yield***. Replacement yield is the number of animals that can be taken in a given year without reducing the total population in the next year.

The new management measures for 2003-2005 allow for a three-year TAC of 975,000, with an annual TAC of up to 350,000 any one or two of the three years, provided that the combined TAC over three years is maintained by a reduction in the TAC in the other years.

Harp seal harvest levels are dependent on both markets and climatic conditions. Since 1996, the harvest has varied from a low of approximately 92,000 seals in 2000 to a high of about 312,000 seals in 2002.

Figure 2: Historical Harp Seal Landings (1951 to 2002)

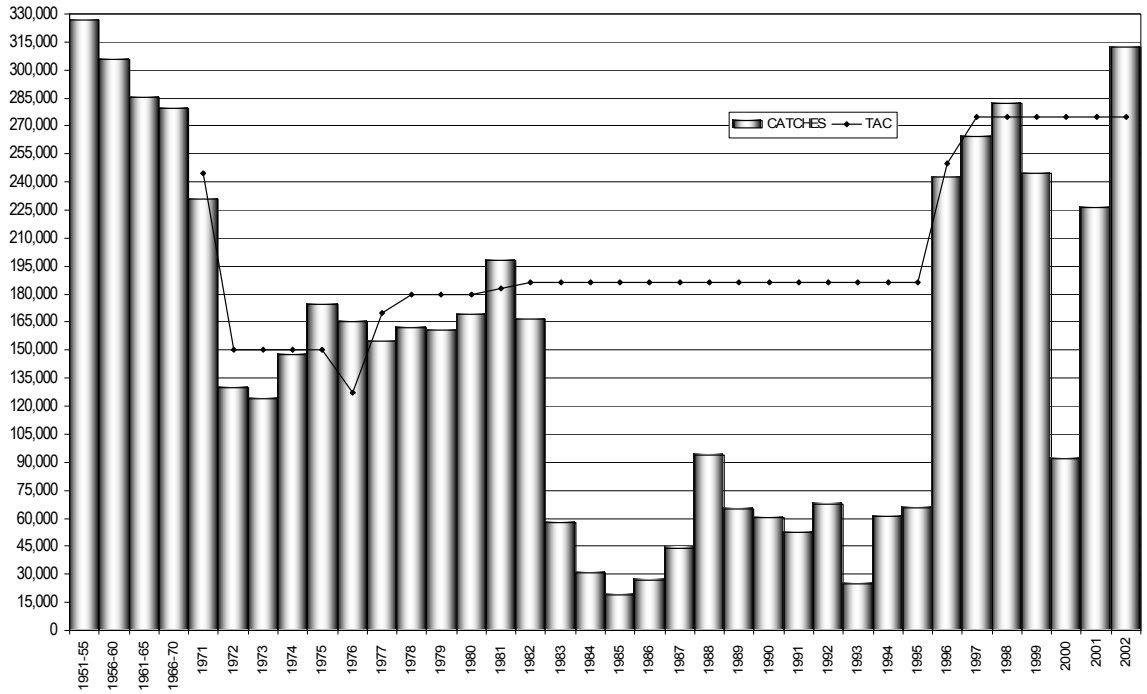
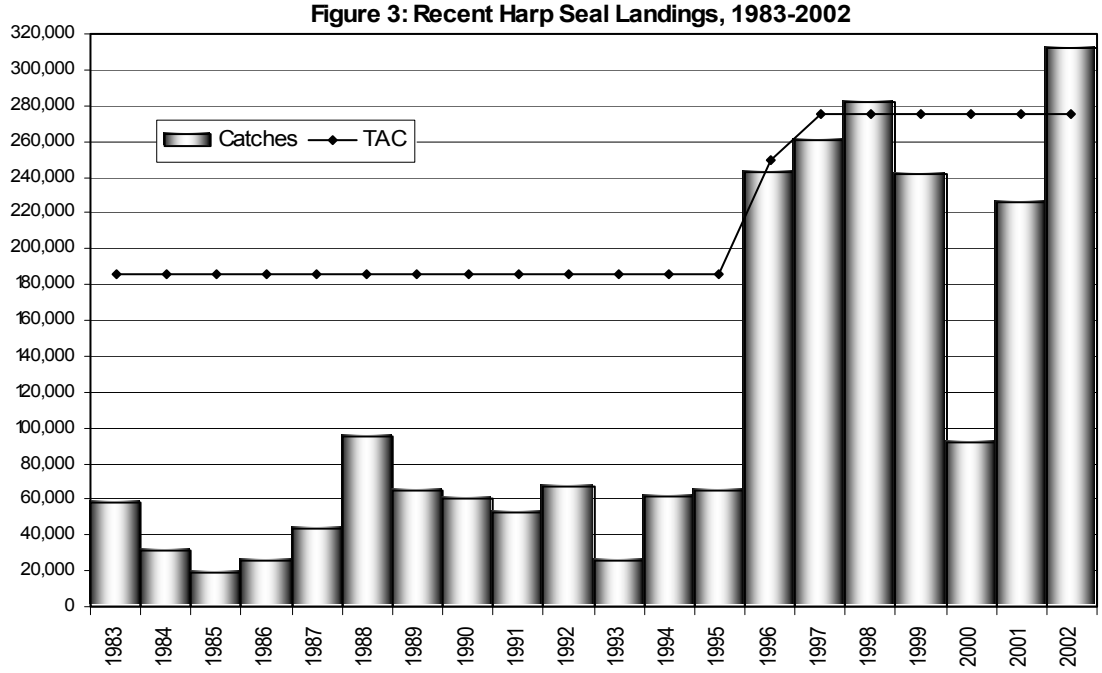
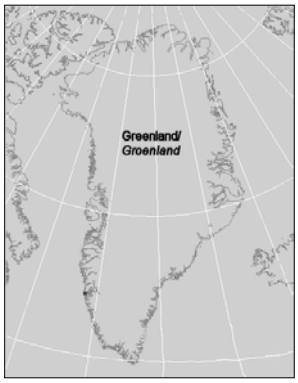


Figure 3: Recent Harp Seal Landings, 1983-2002



3.5.2 Greenland Harvest



Harp and hooded seals from the Northwest Atlantic herds are also hunted in Greenland. Greenland has no TACs, and the annual harvest levels are in the order of 90,000 to 110,000 harp seals and 7,500 hooded seals. There is no shared management regime between Canada and Greenland. In bilateral discussions, Canada has encouraged Greenland to adopt management measures such as a TAC approach and continues to share information updates on the nature and level of hunting that is taking place in both our countries.

3.5.3 Hooded Seals

The hooded seal (*Cystophora cristata*) is a large species (200 kg to 400 kg) found in the Northern Atlantic. In Canada, most pups are born in March in Davis Strait and on the Front. Other hooded seals whelp in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, but very little is known about the relationship between Gulf seals and those in the Front. Surveys conducted in 1990 and 1991 estimated that 80,000 pups were born in the Front and 2,000 in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

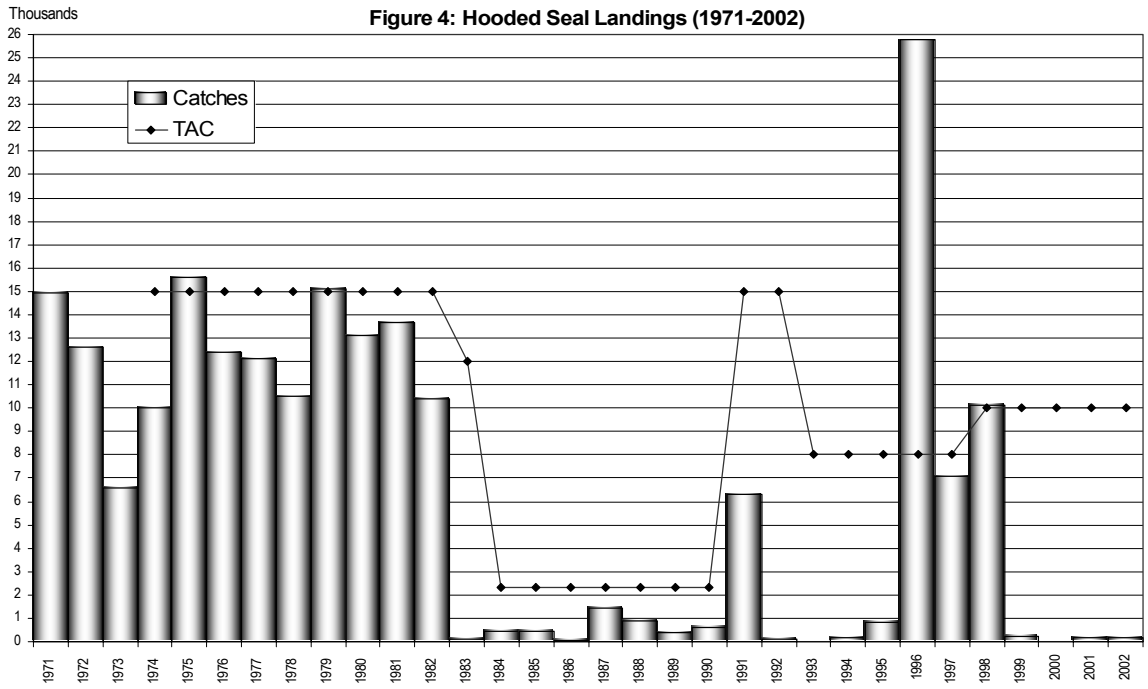
Hooded seals can be harvested in the Front but not in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The TAC for hooded seals has remained at 10,000 since 1998. The hunt for these seals is only a minor part of the commercial and personal use hunts. In recent years the harvest of hooded seals has been less than 200 animals per year. See Figure 4 for recent hooded seal landings.

There is no joint management plan between Canada and Greenland. Greenland harvests around 6,000 to 10,000 hooded seals annually.

In 1996, 22,800 young hooded (blueback) seals were hunted contrary to the *Marine Mammal Regulations* and more than 100 charges were laid. Less than one per cent of licensed sealers were involved in this activity, which took place within a period of a few days. The matter went before the Courts and on December 14, 1999 the Newfoundland Court of Appeal struck down section 27 of the *Marine Mammal*

Regulations, which makes it an offence to buy, sell, or trade blueback seal pelts. In 2000, to conform to the policy enacted as a result of the recommendations of the Malouf Report, licence conditions were imposed to prohibit the taking of blueback and whitecoat seals. On February 22, 2002 the Supreme Court ruled that section 27 is a valid exercise of the federal fisheries power – meaning that DFO can continue to enforce section 27 of the *Marine Mammal Regulations* to prohibit the harvest of whitecoat and blueback seals. The licence conditions imposed in 2000 prohibiting the killing of whitecoat and blueback seals remain in place for the duration of this plan.

Figure 4: Hooded Seal Landings (1971-2002)



3.5.4 Grey Seals

Grey seals *(Halichoerus grypus)* are found in the Gulf of St. Lawrence year-round. In the summer, they can be found in the St. Lawrence River estuary as far upriver as the Saguenay. Grey seals breed on Sable Island, on small islands and on the ice floes in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence, the eastern shore of Nova Scotia and in the New England States from late December to early February. After breeding, they disperse, mainly to the Scotian Shelf, the Gulf of St. Lawrence and off the southern coast of Newfoundland.

The grey seal population was estimated to be 195,000 animals in 1997, with the main breeding concentrations being in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence and on Sable Island. Using the data from the 1997 population survey, projections estimate that the herd on Sable Island has been growing and may have more than doubled, but the Gulf herd has declined by 33% since 1997.

Only small numbers of grey seals are hunted each year and a TAC has not been established. Sealing is limited to a small traditional commercial hunt in an area off the Magdalen Islands and to commercial hunts of small numbers of grey seals in other areas, except Sable Island where no commercial hunting is permitted. Since 1998, commercial sealers have taken 819 grey seals. See Section 12 – Seal Landings by Area and Species.

3.5.5 Ringed Seals

There are limited commercial opportunities for ringed seals on the Atlantic coast off Labrador. In recent years, the ringed seal harvest in Labrador has been in the range of less than 2,000 animals per year. This species is primarily hunted throughout the Arctic for subsistence purposes. There are no obvious conservation concerns with the level of harvest but there are no estimates of population size of ringed seals in Labrador and no active research on abundance. Ringed seals are not dealt with extensively in the Atlantic Seal Hunt Management Plan.

In 2002, there were 1,476 ringed seals taken in Labrador and the Newfoundland Front, compared to 2,009 in 2001. See Section 12 for harvest levels in the last ten years.

Ringed seals are also taken for subsistence purposes in Arctic Canada and are not covered under this plan.

3.5.6 Other Seals

Small numbers of harbour (*Phoca vitulina*) and bearded seals (*Erignathus barbatus*) are taken each year in the subsistence hunt in northern Atlantic areas. In 2002, 96 bearded seals and 334 harbour seals were taken. Total catches of these species over the last ten years are set out in Section 12.

3.5.7 Total Landings

Section 12 shows the Atlantic seal landings for the last 10 years by area and species.

4. MARKET OUTLOOK

Market levels and weather conditions determine the level of each year's hunt (within the allowable quota). In 2002, sealers harvested 312,367 harp seals. There were four major seal buyers/processors in Newfoundland and Labrador, one in Prince Edward Island and one in the Magdalen Islands. In Newfoundland and Labrador, these companies purchased a total of approximately 284,827 harp seal pelts and 2,426 other seal pelts having a landed value of $21 million. Meat and other products were valued at less than $1 million.

Canada exports seal products in three forms: sealskins, seal oil and seal meat. Exports of seal oil and meat have been limited, but prices for both products were good. Exports of seal meat have declined in recent years due to a sharp decline in exports to Asia. That region was replaced by Europe as the main destination for seal oil and skins, but it remains the principal market for seal meat exports. Asia could regain its position as the main market for all types of seal exports when the Asian economies improve to positions that would make seal imports more attractive.

4.1 MARKET DEVELOPMENT

As a result of the government-wide review of priorities and activities in 1994, DFO is no longer involved in product support or promotion activities.

4.2 SEAL PELTS (FUR AND LEATHER)

In the last few years, the seal harvest in Atlantic Canada has been directed at beater seals (independent harp seals between 25 days and 13 months of age). Beater seals provide the most valuable pelts and market conditions are stronger for this type of pelts.

4.3 SEAL MEAT

Finding a market for seal meat outside of Newfoundland continues to present a major challenge for the sealing industry. The amount of seal meat landed in 2002 was extremely low, in part because the hunt was mainly directed at younger animals (beaters), which have very little recoverable meat.

4.4 SEAL OIL

The market for seal oil remains positive. Presently, a good percentage of seal oil is finding its way into areas other than the traditional marine and industrial oils. The industry is positive about this new development but is aware that more R&D is required to expand the range of products derived from seal oil.

4.5 SEAL FLIPPERS

There has always been a local market for a number of seal flippers in Newfoundland. Over the last few years, the value of this market was limited.

4.6 SEAL ORGANS

There has been was virtually no market for seal organs since 1998.

4.7 VALUE OF THE HUNT

Given extremely favourable market conditions in 2002, the estimated landed value of the harp seal hunt was $21 million, compared with an estimated landed value of $5.5 million for 2001. The estimated value is based on the average price buyers paid to sealers.

Besides the economic benefits of the hunt, seals are an important source of nutrition, as well as a focus of social and cultural life for Aboriginal peoples and other residents of Atlantic Canada, Quebec and the Far North.

4.8 CONSULTATION

Each year, it is customary for the Department to hold consultation sessions with the sealing industry in both Newfoundland and the Gulf of St. Lawrence. In particular, the consultations ensure that an open dialogue between resource users and government is maintained to ensure the best management of the seal hunt.

4.8.1 The 2002 Seal Forum

In November 2002, the Department held a Seal Forum in St. John's, Newfoundland to consult with stakeholders and interest groups on the development of a new multi-year seal management plan, based on the report of the Eminent Panel on Seal Management (the Panel). Nearly 200 Canadian organizations were invited to attend the forum and/or to make written submissions related to the multi-year plan.

The consultations focused on the management strategies reviewed by the Panel. These strategies examined a number of different management scenarios for the harp seal hunt, including seal exclusion zones and five scenarios that had a wider general application:

1. The status quo TAC;
2. Harvest regulated by market forces;
3. Potential Biological Removal (PBR) criterion;
4. Harvest to control predation on fish by seals (harvest plus cull to full level of TAC); and
5. Cull to reduce the seal population by a predetermined amount.

The Eminent Panel recommended that the Department develop a generic set of reference points and control rules that could be applied to any of the management scenarios presented in its report. Reference points are indices (e.g. population size) that may be used to evaluate the 'health' of the resource. Control rules are specific, pre-established actions that are triggered at certain reference points; these can include measures such as lower TACs, changes to seasons and area closures. See Section 1.2 for a full description of reference points and control rules.

5. STOCK STATUS

5.1 PROSPECTS FOR 2003-2005

5.1.1 Harp Seals

*The **Precautionary Approach** is a conservation-oriented decision framework, to be applied when there is high scientific uncertainty and a prospect of serious harm.*

The harp seal is the most abundant pinniped in the Northwest Atlantic. Total population size is estimated using a population model that incorporates information on pup production from aerial surveys, information on reproduction rates and known mortalities (including reported harvests in Canada and Greenland, estimates of the number of seals killed but not landed and the number of seals caught as by-catch in fishing gear). The most recent aerial survey, conducted in 1999, resulted in an estimated population of 5.2 million seals. Modeling carried out in early 2003 estimated that the current population size has changed little since 1996 and established the 2003 population at around 5.3 million. This estimate considers the most recent information on pup mortality and harvest.

The Eminent Panel on Seal Management reviewed the harp seal population estimates concluded that the DFO estimates of the population size of harp seal appear to be robust.

Harvest simulations were carried out to predict the future population under various harvest levels. Results from these simulations were used to develop the precautionary approach used in this three-year management plan. If the full quota allowed under the three-year management plan is taken, the model predicts that the harp seal population would be reduced to around 4.7 million by 2006. This is still above the 3.85 million reference point set up under a precautionary approach and well above the established conservation limit of 1.65 million. The population has recovered in the past from an estimated low of around 1.8 million in early 1970s to more than 5 million today.

An assessment of the harp seal population will be carried out to update the status of the population and to review the management plan in 2005.

5.1.2 Hooded Seals

Like harp seals, abundance of hooded seals is estimated from a population model that incorporates information on the number of pups born, reproductive rates and catches. Unfortunately, there are only a two estimates of pup production of hooded seals. The first surveys were carried out in 1984 when pup production in the Davis Strait and at the Front was estimated to be 18,000 and 62,000 respectively.

The only other surveys of hooded seals were carried out in 1990-1991. In 1990, pup production at the Front was estimated to be ~83,000 while surveys in the Gulf of St. Lawrence in 1990 and 1991 estimated that ~2,000 pups were born in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Based on these surveys, total abundance of hooded seals was estimated to be 450,000 to 475,000 animals.

The Seal Panel reviewed the hooded seal abundance estimate. The Panel concluded that there are no reliable estimates of the current size or status of the northwest Atlantic hooded seal population. The Panel stated that a new survey was urgently needed, as are better documented estimates of age-specific pregnancy rates, mortality rates, and the age-structure of the harvest.

5.1.3 Grey Seals

The grey seal population was estimated to be 195,000 animals in 1997, with the main breeding concentrations being in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence and on Sable Island. Using the data from the 1997 population survey, projections estimate that the herd on Sable Island has been growing and may have more than doubled, but the Gulf herd has changed little or has likely declined.

Given the marked changes observed in the Gulf of St. Lawrence since the last population survey and the absence of recent information from Sable Island, no estimates of replacement yield can be calculated.

5.1.4 Ringed Seals

A study of Arctic ringed seals has confirmed the existence of several distinct groups of ringed seals. Based on growth data, along with the existence of geographic barriers, distinct population boundaries can be defined (e.g., Hudson Bay, Baffin Island/Davis Strait, Arctic Archipelago and Beaufort Sea). The structure of the ringed seal population in Labrador is less well known.

In response to a suspected population decline, a sampling program for ringed seals is underway in Hudson Bay in cooperation with the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board. Ringed seals are a critical prey item for polar bears in the North. Consequently, any proposal for a commercial harvest of this species would have to take into account the potential impact on polar bears. There are few detailed estimates of ringed seal abundance for Canadian populations. Hunting of ringed seals is currently done for subsistence only.

5.1.5 Other Seals

There are no reliable population estimates for harbour and bearded seals.

5.2 ENVIRONMENT AND HABITAT

DFO is responsible for managing the sustainable use of fisheries resources with conservation as the paramount consideration. The scope and nature of environmental effects are considered when developing management plans. Various management options are weighed against one another based on careful considerations of all information, including traditional knowledge, local knowledge and industry experience along with the best scientific information available from both DFO and external organizations. This management plan was formulated in consideration of any environmental or habitat concerns.

5.2.1 Species at Risk Act (SARA)

With the advent of *Species at Risk Act*, which received Royal Assent on December 12, 2002, the coming into force of this Act will result in immediate prohibitions against killing, harming, harassing, capturing, taking or possessing any species listed on Schedule 1 of the Act as an extirpated species, an endangered species, or a threatened species, and against damaging or destroying the residence of individuals of a species listed as endangered or threatened. These prohibitions will apply unless a person is authorized, by a permit, licence or other similar document issued in accordance with this Act, to engage in an activity affecting the listed species or the residences of its individuals.

Current management measures in the seal fishery will be examined to determine if a permit, licence or other similar document can be issued, authorizing fishers to engage in the seal fihsery while affecting a listed wildlife species or the residences of its individuals on the basis that :

- affecting a species at risk is incidental to the seal fishery and that
- all reasonable alternatives to the seal fishery that would reduce the impact on a species at risk have been considered and the best solution has been adopted
- all feasible measures will be taken to minimize the impact of the seal fishery on a species at risk or the residences of its individuals
- the seal fishery will not jeopardize the survival or recovery of the species at risk.

If a permit is issued, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans must include in the public registry, an explanation of why it was issued, taking into account the matters referred to above.

If the species is found in an area in respect of which a wildlife management board is authorized by a land claims agreement to perform functions in respect of wildlife species, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans must consult the wildlife management board before issuing a permit concerning that species in that area.

If the species is found in a reserve or in other lands that are set apart for the use and benefit of a band, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans must consult the band before issuing a permit concerning that species in that reserve or those other lands.

The permit must contain any terms and conditions governing the activity that the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans considers necessary for protecting the species, minimizing the impact of the seal fishery on the species or providing for its recovery.

Permits may be issued for a maximum period of three years.

Research in this area is ongoing and management measures may have to be changed based on the conditions noted above.

For more information please see the Environment Canada web page at http://www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca/

5.3 SPECIES INTERACTIONS

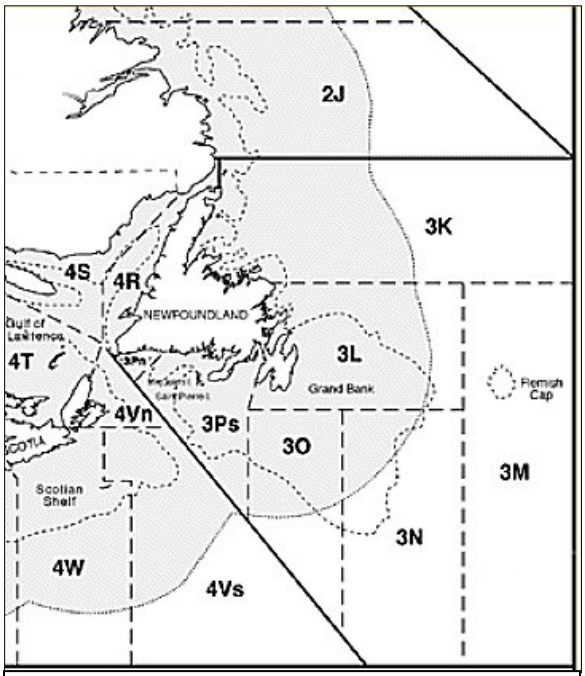


Figure 5 - Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organisation (NAFO) Divisions

Seals in Atlantic Canada consume large quantities of fish. Although highly uncertain, estimates of the amounts of some commercial fish species consumed by seals are large in comparison to current fisheries catches or biomass estimates. Seals also consume large quantities of capelin, which is an important prey for many commercial fish species. Many believe that the predation and competition by seals are responsible for the absence of recovery in many groundfish stocks.

The Eminent Panel on Seal Management reviewed the information available on fish consumption by seals. The Panel indicated that understanding the impact of seal predation on fish populations is a difficult problem as it refers to ecosystem interactions that are complex.

The Panel concluded that seals consume large amounts of fish throughout Atlantic Canada, but that there was much less evidence that this predation was having a major impact on the recovery of most commercial fish stocks. The Panel noted that many of these stocks would probably take a long time to recover to fully exploitable levels, even if all seal predation is removed.

However, the Panel stated that the estimated consumption of Atlantic cod by seals in Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organisation (NAFO) Divisions 4RS3Pn and 2J3KL is particularly large and this may be contributing to the apparently high levels of mortality experienced by those stocks. The Panel however pointed out the high level of uncertainties associated with the estimates of seal consumption. The estimated levels of consumption in 2J3KL cannot be reconciled with the current estimates of abundance of fish stocks.

5.3.1 Seal Exclusion Zones

The concept of seal exclusion zones (or cod conservation areas) is an area-specific management scenario aimed at protecting small areas where cod spawn or aggregate.

The feasibility of the establishment of exclusion zones to protect overwintering aggregations of cod from harp seals is not clear. However, if feasible, they may only be effective in fjord-like environments like Smith Sound in eastern Newfoundland. The Eminent Panel on Seal Management recommended that any attempt to establish such zones should take the form of a scientifically designed trial. The Panel was not convinced that lethal removal of seals would afford significant protection of overwintering aggregations of northern cod.

The Department is evaluating the feasibility and value of establishing seal exclusion zones to protect aggregations of spawning and juvenile groundfish in Atlantic Canada and in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

5.4 RESEARCH

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans has maintained an active seal research program for many years. This program is aimed at better understanding fluctuations in seal populations and the factors that influence numbers and vital rates, as well as the role of seals in marine ecosystems.

***Ecosystem-based Management** means taking account of species interactions and the interdependencies between species and their habitats when making resource management decisions.*

Recently, most of the research has focussed on the population dynamics and the impact of seals on their prey. Research being carried out includes long-term trends in reproductive performance and survival, foraging ecology (seasonal movements and diving behaviour) and diets of seals. These studies are providing a better understanding of predation on fish and invertebrate stocks by seals and how seals interaction with other components of their ecosystem. For example, DFO researchers are studying the transfer of contaminants from females to pups, the impact of contaminants on immune system function, the measurement of heart rate as an indication of energy expenditure, environmental effects on maternal condition, pup growth and size at weaning, and seasonal changes in energy storage and allocation to reproduction.

Other aspects of the seal science program include the monitoring of the health, growth and condition of seals, and determining stock structure, and parasite loads.

DFO research is carried out in collaboration with the Dalhousie University, University of Waterloo, Laval University, Memorial University of Newfoundland, The Sea Mammal Research Unit, St. Andrews University, The Smithsonian Institution, The National Geographic Society, the Norwegian Institute of Fisheries and Aquaculture, the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources, and Aquaplann (Tromso, Norway).

6. MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

6.1 CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

Based on the current abundance of the harp seal population, the OBFM approach is being used for the management of this species. The two objectives are to:

- facilitate a market-driven harvest that will allow sealers to maximize their benefits without compromising conservation; and
- ensure conservation by maintaining the population at a level above 70% (3.85 million) of the maximum observed population (5.5 million).

The lack of good, recent survey data for hooded seals and lower populations for hooded and grey seals does not permit the easy use of such a framework for these two species. Pending further population research and analysis, these species are considered 'Data Poor' and will continue to be managed on a more conservative basis.

6.2 LONG-TERM SUSTAINABLE USE

The 2003-2005 Management Plan provides a management framework to support the long-term, sustainable commercial and subsistence hunt of seals on the Atlantic coast. This hunt provides sealers, Aboriginal peoples and northern residents of Atlantic Canada with an opportunity to use adult and self-reliant juvenile seals to provide economic benefits and food for their families and communities.

6.3 FULL USE OF EACH ANIMAL HUNTED

The federal government continues to encourage the fullest possible use of each seal hunted.

6.4 HUMANE HUNTING PRACTICES

Section 8 of the *Marine Mammal Regulations* stipulates that persons can only dispatch marine mammals in a manner designed to do so quickly. Under these regulations, seals may be killed only by the use of high-powered rifles, shotguns firing slugs, clubs and hakapiks. Further requirements pertaining to the size, weight, muzzle velocity and gauge of weapon are specified in subsection 28(1) of the regulations.

Licensing policy, which requires a commercial sealer to work under an experienced sealer for two years to obtain a professional licence, augments the regulatory requirements. Sealers are also encouraged to take a training course on proper hunting techniques, product preparation and handling. Personal use sealers must have a hunter's capability certificate or big game licence and attend mandatory training sessions before a licence can be issued.

As a result of recommendations received from the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA), a regulatory amendment to improve hunting practices has been implemented. The new regulations include amendments to hunting methods to establish a clearer determination of death before bleeding and skinning as recommended by the CVMA.

The regulations were registered on March 20, 2003 and published in the *Canada Gazette* on April 9, 2003. See Section 7.1 for a full description of the regulatory amendments.

6.5 INTERNATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

6.5.1 Greenland Hunt

Canada and Greenland hunt harp and hooded seals from the same populations. The Canadian and Greenland governments have been exchanging information on their respective hunts and have agreed to continue such exchanges with the intent of verifying harvest activities and strengthening conservation.

6.5.2 Trade and Trade Barriers

Companies continue to pursue marketing opportunities for seal products in Asian markets such as China and Korea.

Canadian seal products are unable to access the United States market due to the prohibition on the import of seal products under the *U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act* (MMPA). This prohibition has been in place since 1972, and the federal government is working in cooperation with provincial governments, Aboriginal representatives and the sealing industry to affect changes that would lead to the elimination of this trade barrier. The Department of Foreign Affairs has the lead on this issue, and is presently developing a plan in an effort to open the U.S. market to Canadian sealing products.

6.5.3 Campaigns and Public Information

The federal government provides factual information about the harvest rate, the nature of the seal hunt, enforcement and conservation measures to diplomatic posts and to foreign and domestic media, businesses, government representatives and citizens. Information is provided in news releases, fact sheets and backgrounders and through DFO's website (**www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca).**

In 2000, the Department launched a new section on its website specifically dedicated to seals, to ensure that information on the seal hunt is current and easily accessible. This website can be accessed at:

http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/seal-phoque/index_e.htm

In addition, the Department of Foreign Affairs will continue to promote public education on the seal hunt on the international front.

6.5.4 Canadian Attitudes Toward the Seal Hunt

In 2000, Fisheries and Oceans Canada undertook a national survey of public attitudes toward the seal hunt. The survey was conducted by the Environics Research Group.

The objective of the survey was to provide the Department and the Eminent Panel on Seal Management with an up-to-date view of public opinion across a range of sealing issues.

Results of the survey indicate that, after being presented with arguments for and against the hunt, 53% of Canadians support the seal hunt. This support would increase if they had confidence that the hunt was being carried out in a humane, well-regulated and sustainable manner. That is an increase of eight percentage points since the last survey in 1992. The complete report is available at:

http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/seal-phoque/reports-rapports/study-etude/study-etude_e.htm

6.6 DOMESTIC CONSIDERATIONS

6.6.1 Equitable Allocation

DFO ensures that all sealers are allocated a minimum share of the TAC of harp seals, based on their traditional reliance on seals and recognizing the importance of this industry to residents of coastal communities adjacent to the major sealing areas.

Each year, before the hunt begins consultations are held with industry regarding allocation of the TAC. Industry committees are established to help decide the reallocation to various areas and fleet sectors if and when specific fleet sectors harvest their allocations.

DFO continues to be supportive of Aboriginal efforts to hunt seals commercially. This plan provides an allocation for Labrador sealers to hunt harp seals commercially. There is also an allocation for harp seals for the Canadian Arctic, as sealing for this species has been limited in recent years. DFO is mindful that there may be opportunities for a commercial harp seal hunt in the Canadian Arctic and will discuss allocations and re-allocations as opportunities arise.

6.6.2 Good Sealing Practices

To ensure that seals are handled and processed so as to provide high-quality products, as well as dispatched quickly and humanely, licensing policy requires a form of apprenticeship before a commercial sealer can obtain a professional licence. As well, personal use sealing licences will not be issued to any person who did not have a licence, a valid hunter's capability certificate or big game licence the previous year, and who has not attended a mandatory training session.

DFO works closely with the sealing industry to help develop and provide information sessions on methods of hunting, handling and processing to ensure high standards for Canadian seal products.

The *Marine Mammal Regulations* stipulate that persons can only dispatch seals in a manner designed to do so quickly. The regulatory amendments that came into force in 2003, establish a clearer determination of death before bleeding and skinning.

7. CURRENT MANAGEMENT ISSUES

7.1 REGULATORY REVIEW – (*MARINE MAMMAL REGULATIONS*)

The current regulations governing the seal hunt were enacted in 1993 to reflect the sealing policy announced by the Honourable Tom Siddon on December 30, 1987, which was based on the Malouf Commission Report.

Since 1998, DFO has consulted with over 80 groups on prospective changes to the regulations respecting seals and sealing. The proposed amendments were developed as a result of extensive consultations with Aboriginal groups, the sealing and fishing industry, scientists, academics, veterinarians, provincial and federal officials, and conservation and animal rights groups.

The proposed regulatory amendments to the *Marine Mammal Regulations* were published in the March 2nd 2002 edition of the *Canada Gazette (Part I)* to provide a final opportunity for public comment.

The Special Committee of Council (SCC) considered and approved the proposed amendments on March 19, 2003. The regulations were registered on March 20, 2003 and published in the *Canada Gazette (Part II)* on April 9, 2003. These Regulations are filed under Statutory Order or Regulations (SOR) number: SOR/2003-103. The full text of the regulatory amendments can be found on the *Canada Gazette* website at:

http://canadagazette.gc.ca/index-e.html

Follow the links to *Part II* and select the issue of April 9, 2003.

The regulatory amendments are intended to improve the management of the seal hunt by:

- establishing separate licences for commercial and non-aboriginal personal use sealing;
- establishing licences for vessels greater than 65' to collect seals from sealing vessels.
- establishing licences and licence prerequisites to allow the killing of nuisance seals where there is a danger to property and other efforts have failed or where they are inflicting great damage on migrating fish stocks;
- introducing testing methods which will establish a clearer determination of death before bleeding and skinning. This is meant to ensure that all animals are checked for death after they are shot or clubbed, using a method recommended by veterinarians;
- establishing a requirement to land either the pelt or carcass of seals taken by commercial or personal use sealers. This will make it illegal to harvest a seal for only smaller parts such as its organs; and
- introducing an extension of the application of existing gear restrictions to commercial sealing throughout Atlantic Canada. This would prevent the use of nets for all commercial sealing and would ensure a consistent standard for sealing.

These amendments apply only to commercial and non-aboriginal personal use sealing. The regulations do not apply to aboriginal sealing for food, social or ceremonial purposes.

These regulations are filed under Statutory Orders and Regulations (SOR) number: SOR/2003-103. The Regulatory Impact Analysis Statement (RIAS) was published in the in the *Canada Gazette* of April 9, 2003 together with the amendments to the Regulations.

7.2 THE EMINENT PANEL ON SEAL MANAGEMENT

In response to the *13th Report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans* (SCOFO) Minister Dhaliwal appointed a panel to evaluate the current state of scientific knowledge, and to provide advice on a long-term strategy for the management of seal populations in Atlantic Canada

The panel's report, which was submitted in the fall of 2001, helped DFO develop a multi-year management strategy for seals from 2003 to 2005. The report's findings formed the basis of consultations during the Seal Forum held in St. John's, in November 2002. More than 200 Canadian organizations were invited to attend and make written submissions related to the multi-year plan.

8. MANAGEMENT MEASURES FOR 2003-2005

8.1 TOTAL ALLOWABLE CATCHES (TACS)

8.1.1 Harp Seals

The three-year TAC for harp seals (2003-2005) is set at 975,000 animals, with an annual TAC up to 350,000 in any two years provided that the combined TAC over three years is maintained by a reduction in the TAC in the other years.

8.1.2 Hooded Seals

The TAC will remain at 10,000 per year. As in previous years, there will be no hunt of hooded seals in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

8.1.3 Grey Seals

A small harvest of grey seals will be allowed in areas other than Sable Island.

8.1.4 Ringed, Harbour and Other Seals

There are no TACs or allocations set on these species. Licenses and permits will be used to control any commercial harvest for these species.

8.1.5 Subsistence Catches

The subsistence hunt of small numbers of harp, hooded, grey, ringed, bearded and harbour seals will continue. Any subsistence hunt of seals in areas other than Atlantic Canada is not dealt with in this plan, although an allocation of harp seals is made for the hunt in the Canadian Arctic.

8.2 HUNT LOCATION AND TIMING

Residents of Labrador north of 53°N latitude and the Arctic (Sealing Areas 1 to 4 – see map in Section 15) can hunt seals of any species at any time of the year for subsistence purposes, except as specified for ringed seals below. Aboriginal persons can also hunt seals throughout the year for food, social and ceremonial purposes.

8.2.1 Harp Seals

The commercial hunt takes place in traditional sealing areas on the Front (Sealing Areas 5 to 8) and in the Gulf (sealing areas 9 to 16, 20, 22, 26 and 27 – see map in Section 15). As per the *Marine Mammal Regulations*, the season is from November 15 to May 15. Regional Directors General may alter the seasons (close times) by publicly issuing Variation Orders. The taking of whitecoat seals is prohibited.

The personal use hunt is allowed off Newfoundland, Labrador south of 53°N latitude and off Quebec's North Shore, the Gaspé Peninsula and the Magdalen Islands. The season is the same as the commercial season and is established by the period of validity on licences. It is illegal for personal use licence holders to take whitecoats.

8.2.2 Hooded Seals

The commercial season is from November 15 to May 15 in Sealing Areas 4 to 7 and 12. Regional Directors General may alter the seasons (close times) by publicly issuing Variation Orders. Sealing Areas 8 to 11 and 13 to 33 (see map in Section 15) are areas where hooded seals have not been hunted and they remain closed. The taking of young hooded seals (bluebacks) is prohibited.

Personal use licences may allow hooded seals to be taken in areas where the commercial season is open. It is illegal for personal use licence holders to harvest bluebacks.

8.2.3 Grey Seals

The timing of the grey seal hunt is controlled by condition of licence. The small commercial hunt near the Magdalen Islands may occur in January and February, and other grey seal hunts may be approved on a case-by-case basis. There is no personal use hunt for grey seals.

8.2.4 Ringed and Other Seals

The season for the subsistence hunt of ringed seals in Labrador is from April 25 to November 30. The taking of bearded and harbour seals taken for subsistence purposes is allowed throughout the year.

8.3 ALLOCATIONS

8.3.1 Harp Seals

The overall TAC of harp seals is subdivided into commercial sealing allocations applicable to different areas and fleet sectors, a personal use allocation for all areas and a subsistence allocation for northern communities.

Seals harvested by sealers licensed in an area or sub-area are counted against the allocation for that area or sub-area regardless of the area in which they are taken.

For the 2003 sealing season industry groups have agreed to allocate the maximum 350,000 harp seals as shown in Section 13.

The allocation increase to 350,000 harp seals from 275,000 has been pro-rated across the different fleet sectors. The only difference is that the prorated increase in the Newfoundland Front area between the <35' fleet and the 35'-65' fleet has been split 60/40 to allow greater participation from the small boat sector. Sixty percent of the increase was allocated to the <35' sector, and forty percent to the 35'-65' sector.

For 2004 and 2005 a new allocation regime may be instituted as circumstances such as market conditions, weather patterns and fleet distribution change.

Affected stakeholder groups are consulted on any in-season re-allocations or sub-allocations among sectors or areas. Committees have been established for this purpose.

8.3.2 Hooded Seals

The TAC of 10,000 hooded seals is for sealing in the Front, is not allocated among the various hunters, and applies to commercial and subsistence sealers in the aggregate. There is no hooded seal hunt in the Gulf.

8.3.3 Ringed and Other Seals

There are no TACs or allocations of other species of seals. Conditions of licence are used to limit the commercial hunt of grey seals to a small number. Licences will also be used to control any commercial hunt of ringed seals. There are no allocations for ringed, harbour or bearded seals taken in the subsistence hunt.

8.4 OTHER PLAN ELEMENTS

As well as the TACs, seasons and allocations noted above, this Management Plan includes the elements noted below. The *Marine Mammal Regulations* and the *Seal Licensing Policy for Eastern Canada* are used to manage many of these elements.

8.5 MAJOR ELEMENTS

Whitecoats (harp seal pups) and bluebacks (young hooded seals) may not be hunted.

Persons may not hunt adult seals in breeding or whelping patches.

Land-based sealers with or without small vessels (65 feet and less in length) will do the hunting, although vessels beyond that length may be considered for use to collect, transport and prepare hunted seals from small vessels and as safe havens for sealers in bad weather.

DFO will continue to enforce regulatory requirements for the firearms, ammunition, clubs and hakapiks used in sealing to ensure the right tools are used properly for the quick and humane dispatch of animals.

8.6 SPECIFIC LICENSING ELEMENTS

Licences are not required by Labrador residents north of 53°N latitude hunting seals in Sealing Areas 1 to 4 for food purposes. They are also not required by Aboriginal people hunting for food, social or ceremonial purposes and who are not the beneficiaries of a claims agreement.

The *Commercial Fisheries Licensing Policy for Eastern Canada (1996)* made under authority of the *Fisheries Act* governs the issuance of sealing licences.

Under the authority of this policy, professional commercial sealing licences may be issued only to full-time or bona fide fishers registered with DFO who:

a) Held a professional sealing licence the previous year; or

b) Have participated in the seal hunt during the previous two years as the holder of an assistant sealing licence.

Assistant sealing licences may be issued only to persons who are in possession of written confirmation, from a professional sealer, to the effect that the assistant sealer will be hunting seals under the supervision of the professional sealer during the sealing season.

Personal use sealing licences, allowing the hunt of up to six seals a year for personal consumption, may be issued only to residents who:

a) Live adjacent to established sealing areas throughout Newfoundland, in Labrador south of 53°N latitude, on Quebec's North Shore, the Gaspé Peninsula and the Magdalen Islands; and

b) Held a personal use sealing licence in the previous year; or

c) Hold a valid provincial hunting licence for big game or a hunter's capability certificate to demonstrate their proficiency with firearms* and have attended a mandatory information session on regulations, safety and the proper handling of hunted seals.

The use of firearms to hunt seals near communities or areas of fishing activity may be controlled by condition of licence to ensure public safety and an orderly hunt. In Newfoundland, the licence condition on firearm states: "While fishing and attempting to fish for seals, you are not permitted to possess a rifle that produces a muzzle velocity of less than 1,800 feet per second and/or a muzzle energy of less than 1,100 foot pounds."

9. Conservation and Protection Issues and Strategies

The major emphasis of DFO's Conservation and Protection strategies will be on monitoring catches, ensuring humane hunting practices and enforcing the prohibition on the harvest of whitecoat and blueback seals.

9.1 Observer Coverage

It is customary for the Department to place independent observers on a number of fishing vessels to monitor activities. This is commonly referred to as "observer coverage". In the conduct of the seal hunt, observer coverage is used to provide unbiased, timely information on catch, seal and vessel concentrations, overall activities in specific hunting areas and promote compliance with regulations. The level of observer coverage varies from year to year depending on requirements.

9.2 Enforcement Priorities

The following table shows the enforcement priorities during the conduct of the annual seal hunt.

TABLE 2: ENFORCEMENT PRIORITIES

Priority	Regulation	Strategy
Monitor hunt and enforce regulations	Sections 8, 28(2) and 29 (1) of the *Marine Mammal Regulations*	♦ aerial surveillance ♦ on-site inspections ♦ observer coverage
Maintain accurate reporting of landings and quota compliance	Section 22 of the Fishery (General) Regulations	♦ in-port inspections ♦ observer coverage ♦ on-site inspections
Monitor by-catches of seals	Section 5 of the Marine Mammal Regulations and Section 33 of the Fishery (General) Regulations	♦ in-port inspections ♦ observer coverage ♦ on-site inspections
Ensure that no whitecoats or bluebacks are harvested	Licence condition	♦ aerial surveillance ♦ on-site inspections ♦ in-port inspections ♦ observer coverage

* Applicants from the Magdalen Islands need not meet the requirements for firearms proficiency if they are using a club in accordance with the traditional hunting practices in that area.

9.3 OBJECTIVES

DFO will seek the effective application of legislation, policies and directives related to:

- Quotas;
- Licensing;
- The prohibition on harvesting of whitecoats and bluebacks;
- Hunting methods (humane hunting and instruments);
- Observation permits; and
- Communications.

9.4 QUOTAS/QUOTA MONITORING

Sealers are required to maintain logbooks and hail (report orally) seal harvests daily for vessels greater than 35 feet in overall length. These reports, and hunt estimates made by fishery officers, are compiled, by species, zone and vessel class, in weekly quota reports. For vessels less than 35 feet in overall length and land-based sealers, fishery officers provide hunt estimates based on community reports, plant statistics, weekly reports and/or checks of landings. In Newfoundland, weekly reports are compiled based on species, area and vessel class.

9.5 ENFORCEMENT/REGULATIONS

The enforcement objectives are to seek overall compliance with regulations and to ensure the maintenance of effective quota monitoring. Priority is be given to enforcing regulations pertaining to proper hunting techniques, the accurate reporting of landings and quota compliance, monitoring by-catches of seals in other fisheries and ensuring that whitecoats and bluebacks are not hunted for commercial purposes.

9.6 ENFORCEMENT STRATEGY

The enforcement program is based on the utilization of air/surface platforms, as well as on the deployment of fishery officers and observers.

9.7 AIR SURVEILLANCE

Commencing in mid-February, fixed-wing aerial patrols are conducted to determine the location of seals and sealing vessels. If necessary, the frequency of patrols is increased during the season. Helicopter patrols are conducted in both the Gulf and Front areas as required.

9.8 AT-SEA SURVEILLANCE

During peak harvest activity, patrol vessels with fishery officers conduct at-sea surveillance in the Newfoundland Region. Fishery officers conduct at-sea boardings to ensure compliance with the *Marine Mammal Regulations*, with particular emphasis on hunting methods. Fishery officers may also be deployed directly on sealing vessels and randomly moved to various vessels throughout the fleet.

In both the Newfoundland Region and the Magdalen Islands area, Canadian Coast Guard vessels may be called upon for assistance if required to transport fishery officers to the hunt.

9.9 OTHER PATROL/SURVEILLANCE ACTIVITY

Fishery officers conduct coastal patrols, dockside checks and quota monitoring.

9.10 ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE/OTHER ASSISTANCE

The RCMP is available, upon request, should situations arise where assistance is required in both the Front and Gulf areas. As required, DFO participates in joint patrols with the RCMP and the Sûreté du Québec to ensure an orderly hunt.

9.11 MONITORING OF ENFORCEMENT OPERATIONAL PLAN

Weekly conference calls are conducted to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the operational plan. If required, in-season adjustments are made to the plan.

10. MANAGEMENT PLAN EVALUATION CRITERIA

- Sustainable hunt within the TAC
- Adherence to regulations
- Fullest possible use — product sales
- Number of participants throughout season
- Economic benefits
- Consultations with stakeholders

11. CONSERVATION AND PROTECTION PLAN EVALUATION CRITERIA

- Compliance with overall TAC
- Compliance with quota and allocations
- Compliance with blueback/whitecoat prohibition
- Number of incidents
- Number of warnings issued
- Number of charges laid
- Penalties
- Feedback from sealing industry
- Feedback from fishery officers
- Feedback from public

12. SEAL LANDINGS BY AREA AND SPECIES — 1993 TO 2002

Species	Year	Nfld. Front/ Labrador	Newfound-land Gulf	Cape Breton, N.S., P.E.I.	Magdalen Islands	Quebec North Shore	Personal Use	Yearly Total
Harp Seals	1993	20,260	2,541	25	1,572	777	0	25,175
	1994	52,914	6,811	56	330	1,065	0	61,176
	1995	52,378	8,238	470	1,196	3,109	0	65,391
	1996	165,335	60,856	1,145	13,709	1,672	0	242,717
	1997	198,841	33,754	255	28,900	2,454	0	264,204
	1998	215,693	44,154	3,127	18,075	1,021	0	282,070
	1999	148,005	56,202	3,528	34,756	711	1,350	244,552
	2000	82,104	3,610	0	5,167	0	721	91,602
	2001	80,990	124,359	1,020	17,621	0	2,503	226,493
	2002	238,429	58,021	1,173	6,875	6,206	1,663	312,367
Hooded Seals	1993	19	0	0	0	0	0	19
	1994	129	20	0	0	0	0	149
	1995	856	1	0	0	0	0	857
	1996	25,712	42	0	0	0	0	25,754
	1997	7,024	34	0	0	0	0	7,058
	1998	10,144	4	0	0	0	0	10,148
	1999	182	6	0	0	0	13	201
	2000	10	0	0	0	0	0	10
	2001	123	17	0	0	0	0	140
	2002	20	0	0	0	0	130	150
Ringed Seals	1994	1,581	0	0	0	0	0	1,581
	1995	1,384	0	0	0	0	0	1,384
	1996	670	0	0	0	0	0	670
	1997	1,639	0	0	0	0	0	1,639
	1998	1,046	0	0	0	0	0	1,046
	1999	772	0	0	0	0	0	772
	2000	1,695	0	0	0	0	0	1,695
	2001	2,008	1	0	0	0	0	2,009
	2002	1,472	2	0	0	0	0	1,474
Grey Seals	1993	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1994	0	0	0	40	0	0	40
	1995	0	0	7	357	0	0	364
	1996	0	40	33	59	0	0	132
	1997	0	0	0	72	0	0	72
	1998	0	0	69	206	0	0	275
	1999	0	0	98	0	0	0	98
	2000	0	0	342	0	0	0	342
	2001	0	1	75	0	0	0	76
	2002	0	0	0	126	0	0	126
Harbour Seals	1995	27	0	0	0	0	0	27
	1996	58	0	0	0	0	0	58
	1997	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1998	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1999	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	2000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	2001	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	2002	318	0	0	0	0	16	334
Bearded Seals	1994	84	0	0	0	0	0	84
	1995	24	0	0	0	0	0	24
	1996	45	0	0	0	0	0	45
	1997	118	9	0	0	0	0	127
	1998	56	0	0	0	0	0	56
	1999	60	1	0	0	0	0	61
	2000	63	0	0	0	0	0	63
	2001	168	0	0	0	0	0	168
	2002	89	0	0	0	0	0	89

13. HARP SEAL ALLOCATIONS FOR 2003

The table below illustrates the maximum number of harp seals that can be caught by any fleet sector in the 2003 seal hunt. The total 2003 allocation represents a ceiling and is in no way an indication of the actual number of catches. Harvest levels depend on market demand.

2003 PRO-RATED INCREASE OF HARP SEAL TAC
(Based on 350,000)

General Area	Category of Sealing	2002 Allocation	Prorated Increase based on 350,000	60% Small boat/ 40% Large boat	TOTAL 2003 Allocation	Sealing Area(s)
Northern Areas	Subsistence Sealing	2 000	545		2 545	1 to 4
Labrador	Commercial	10 000	2 727		12 727	4
All Areas	Personal Use Sealing	2 000	545		2 545	5 to 20
Total Northern Areas & Personal Use		**14 000**	**3 818**		**17 818**	
Front Area	Commercial					
Front Area	- Vessels <35'	64 000		30 109	94 109	5 to 8
Front Area	- Vessels 35' to 65'	120 000		20 073	140 073	5 to 8
FRONT	**TOTAL**	**184 000**	**50 182**		**234 182**	**4 to 8**
Gulf	Vessels <35' (late season)	7 000	1 909		8 909	
Gulf	Gulf — vessels < 35'	20 000	5 455		25 455	9 to 27
Gulf	Gulf — vessels 35' to 65'	50 000	13 636		63 636	9 to 27
GULF	**TOTAL**	**77 000**	**21 000**		**98 000**	**9 to 27**
CANADIAN TOTAL ALLOWABLE CATCH		**275 000**	**75 000**		**350 000**	**ALL**

This management plan provides for a harp seal TAC of 975,000 animals over three years with an annual TAC up to 350,000 in any two years provided that the combined TAC over three years is maintained by a reduction in the TAC in the other years.

The allocation between areas and sectors is subject to change.

The 2,545 harp seal allocation for subsistence sealing in northern areas (Sealing Areas 1 to 4) is a nominal amount only – it is not a quota.

For the purpose of the allocations set out in the above table, sealers that obtain access to the seals without the use of a vessel shall be considered as sealers on vessels less than 35 feet.

The late season allocation of 8,909 seals for the Gulf is meant to allow sealers from the Quebec North Shore to access to the seal herds as they pass through their area after their migration to the southern Gulf.

14. NEWS RELEASE

News Release

NR-HQ-03-01E

Thibault Announces
Multi-Year Atlantic Seal Hunt Management Measures

February 3, 2003

OTTAWA -- The Honourable Robert G. Thibault, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, announced today the 2003-2005 Atlantic Seal Hunt Management Plan.

"I am pleased to introduce a new, multi-year management approach to the Atlantic Seal Hunt," said Minister Thibault. "This plan presents sealers with greater certainty in planning their activities and provides greater flexibility for both the Department and industry to adapt to variable environmental and market conditions over a three-year period."

The harp seal Total Allowable Catch (TAC) is set at 975,000 over three years with an annual TAC of up to 350,000 in any two years. For example, sealers could take 350,000 seals in two of the three years, but would only be allowed to take 275,000 in the other year. Harp seals are the most populous of the seal species on the Atlantic coast and are the major species hunted for commercial purposes. The North Atlantic harp seal population is healthy and abundant – 5.2 million based on the latest peer-reviewed survey. By comparison, it was 1.8 million in 1970.

"Seal management is founded on sound conservation principles to ensure harvest opportunities now and in the future," said Minister Thibault. "Seals are a valuable natural resource that, when harvested sustainably, provide valuable income to about 12,000 Canadian sealers and their families."

The Honourable Gerry Byrne, Minister of State for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, applauded the new approach of a multi-year management plan. "Sealing provides important economic benefits to Atlantic Canada and the inherent flexibility in the plan enables sealers to maximize their profits over a three-year period."

The Department is adopting an Objective-Based Fisheries Management (OBFM) approach that will provide a clearer basis for managing the harp seal hunt. OBFM uses reference points and control rules to establish management measures for a fishery. Where there is an abundant resource, OBFM will facilitate a market-driven harvest that will enable sealers to maximize their benefits without compromising conservation. Reference points are set at 70%, 50% and 30%, based on the maximum observed size of the herd at 5.5 million. The Department will ensure conservation by maintaining the population at a level above the 70% reference point, or 3.85 million. Under the OBFM model, if the full TAC is taken over the three-year plan, it is estimated the population in 2006 will be about 4.7 million harp seals – well above the 70% threshold.

The Department will continue to emphasize at-sea surveillance and conduct dock-side checks; monitor quotas; check sealers for proper licence and observation permits; as well as ensure humane hunting practices, compliance with Marine Mammal Regulations and the proper use of hunting instruments. As always, the Department promotes the fullest possible use of each animal harvested.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 2003-2005 MANAGEMENT PLAN

Total Allowable Catch

Harp Seals – 975,000 over three years with an annual TAC up to 350,000 in any two years.

Hooded Seals – The TAC will remain at 10,000 per year. As in previous years, there will be no hunt of hooded seals in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Grey Seals – A small harvest of grey seals will be allowed in areas other than Sable Island.

Ringed, Harbour and Bearded Seals – There are no TACs or allocations set on these species. Licenses and permits will be used to control any commercial harvest for these species.

Conservation

The Department will evaluate the feasibility and value of establishing seal exclusion zones to protect aggregations of spawning cod stocks.

The Department will continue to enforce a prohibition on the harvest of whitecoat and blueback seals.

In 2000, the Eminent Panel on Seal Management was established to provide advice on a new long-term strategy for the management of seal populations in Atlantic Canada. The Panel submitted its report to the Department in December 2001. The Panel's report, along with consultations with more than 100 stakeholders last November at the 2002 Seal Forum in St. John's, greatly assisted in the development of this plan.

Backgrounders related to this announcement:

- Seals

- Objective-Based Fisheries Management (OBFM)

- Speaking notes for the Honourable Robert. G. Thibault - 2003-2005 Seal Management Plan

http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/media/newsrel/2003/ha-ac01_e.htm

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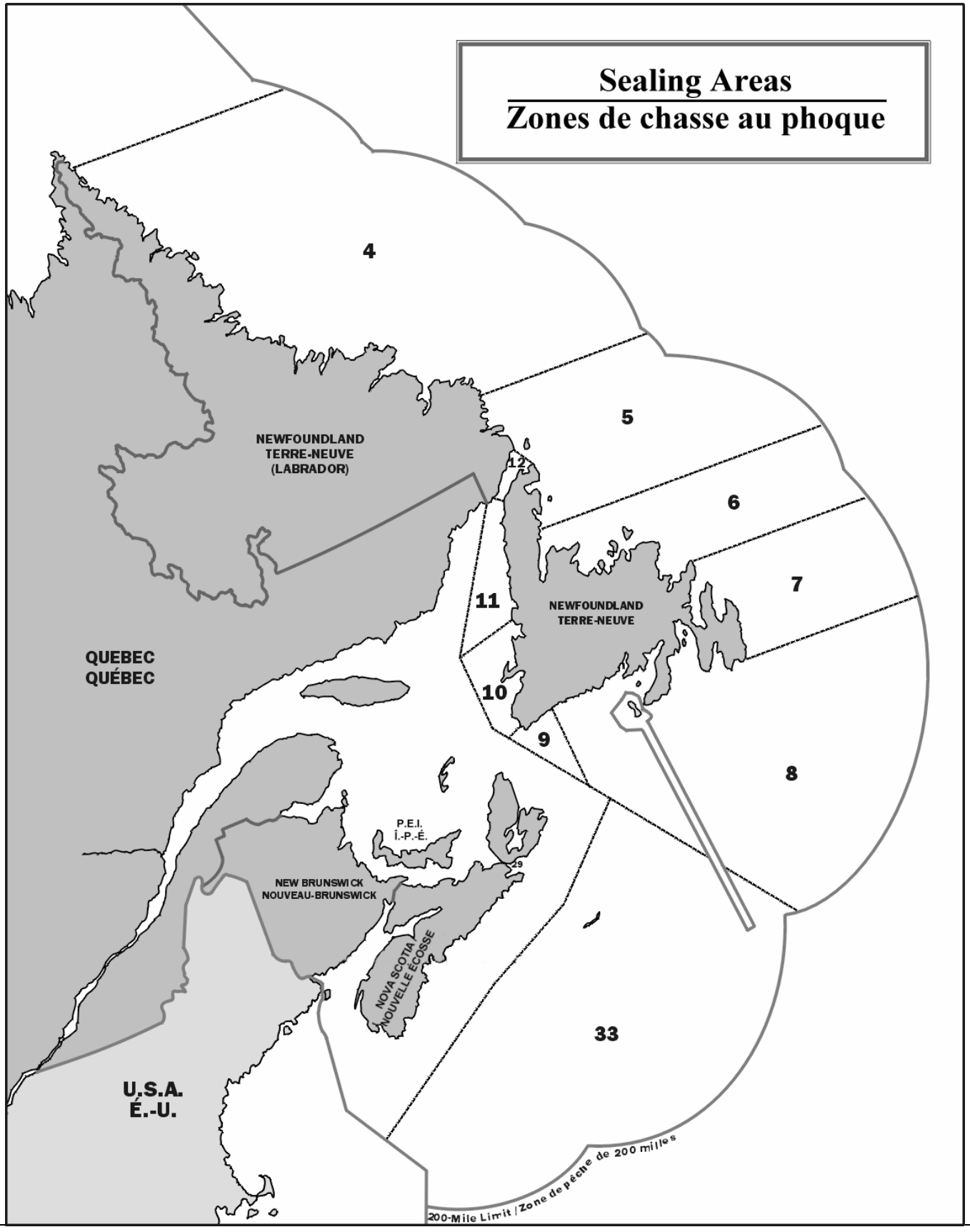
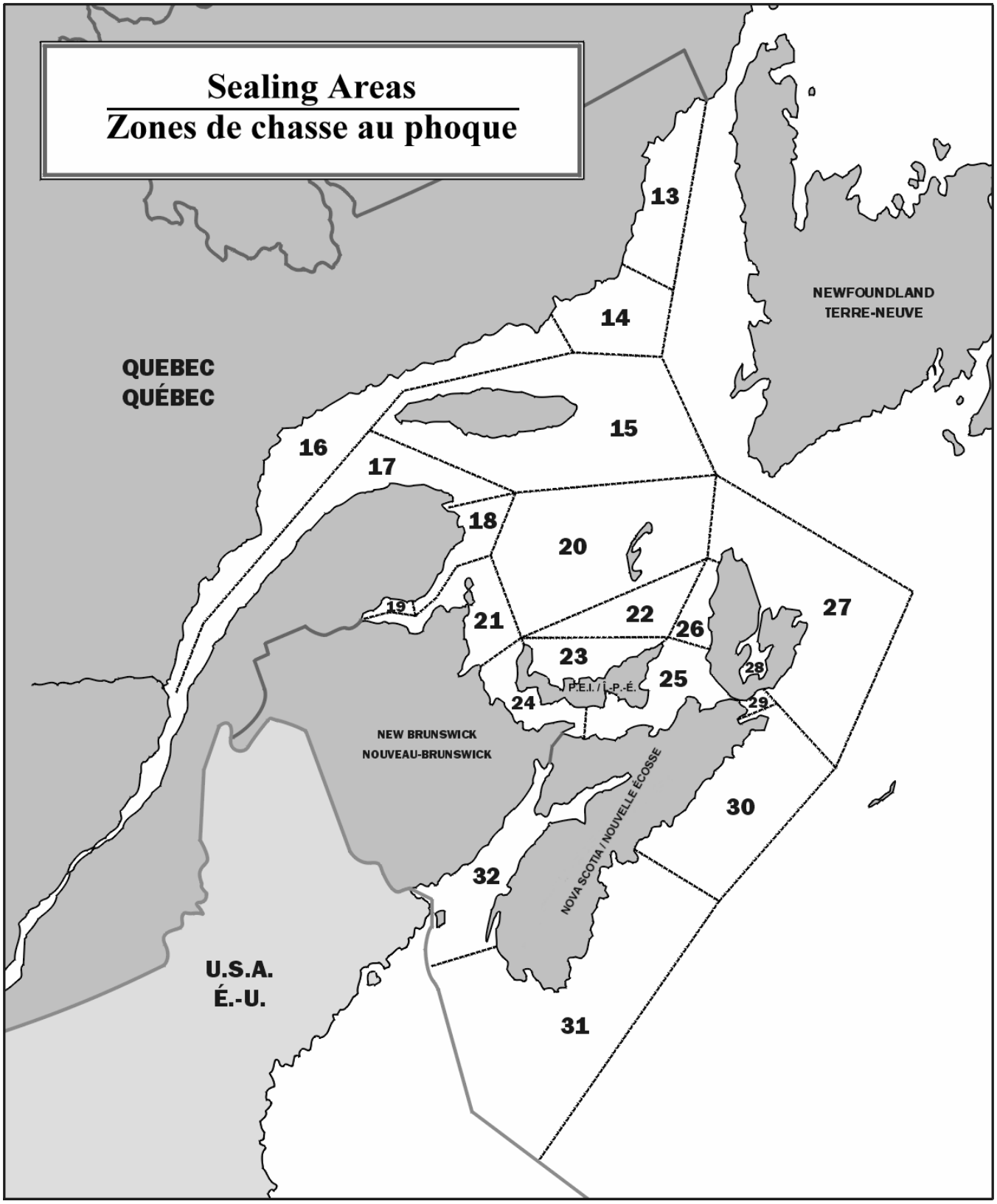
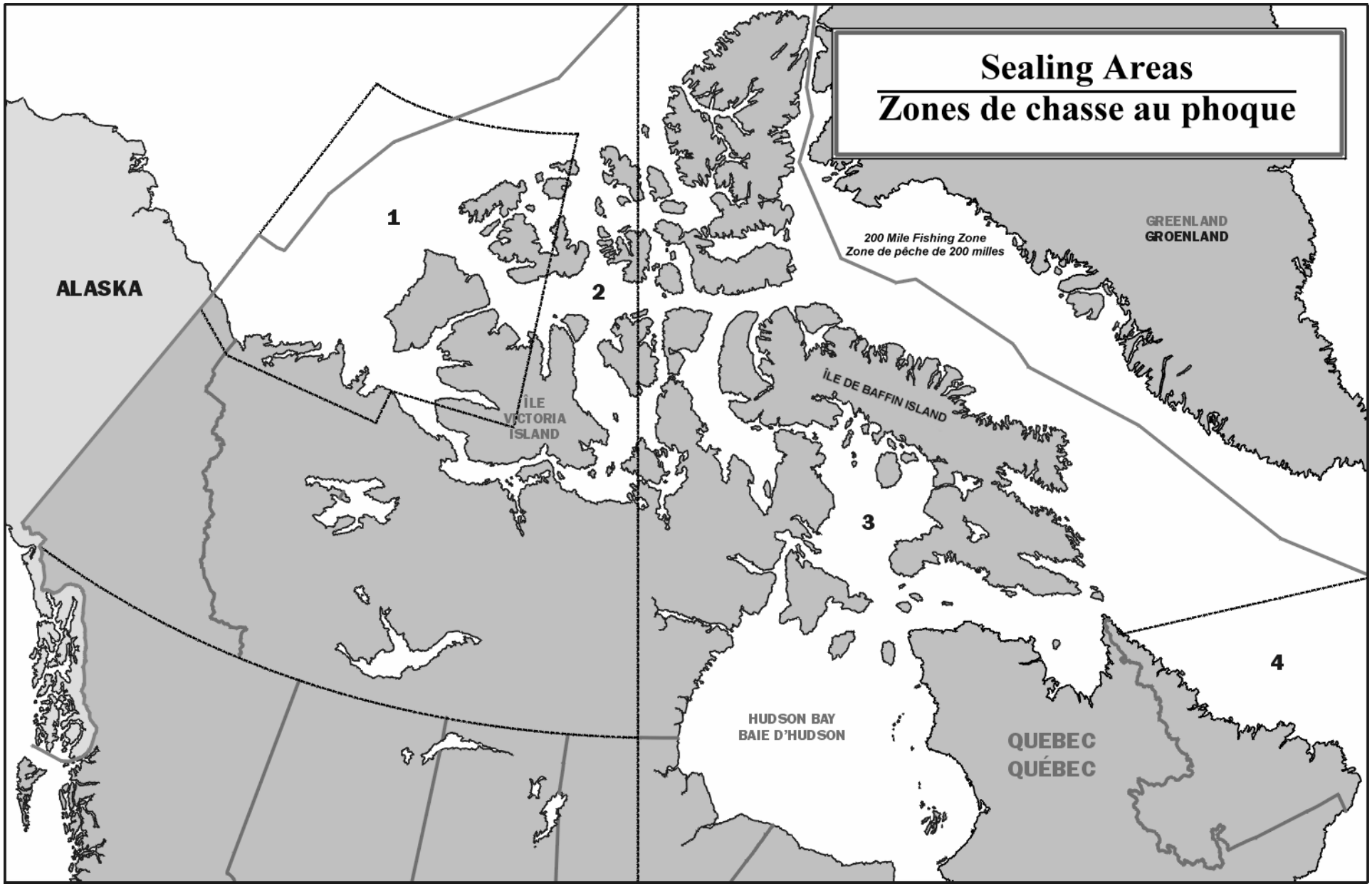
15. Maps of Sealing Areas




Sealing Areas
Zones de chasse au phoque
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
NEWFOUNDLAND
TERRE-NEUVE
QUEBEC
QUÉBEC
NEW BRUNSWICK
NOUVEAU-BRUNSWICK
P.E.I. / Î.-P.-É.
NOVA SCOTIA / NOUVELLE ÉCOSSE
U.S.A.
É.-U.


Sealing Areas
Zones de chasse au phoque
ALASKA
1
2
3
4
200 Mile Fishing Zone
Zone de pêche de 200 milles
GREENLAND
GROENLAND
ÎLE VICTORIA ISLAND
ÎLE DE BAFFIN ISLAND
HUDSON BAY
BAIE D'HUDSON
QUEBEC
QUÉBEC