

## SIX FACTS ABOUT CANADA'S SEAL HUNT

**Canada takes its role as a steward of the natural environment very seriously in protecting its wildlife and other natural resources and it remains committed to the conservation and sustainability of its ecosystems for future generations. Canada ensures the protection of species at risk and diligently regulates hunting where animal populations are abundant, as in the case of seals.**

**The Government of Canada regulates the seal hunt through its Department of Fisheries and Oceans. The proportion of animals that may be hunted is based on sound conservation principles, as well as a commitment to peer reviewed scientific advice to help ensure the continued health and abundance of seal populations.**

**While Canada certainly respects individuals' right to oppose the seal hunt, many myths about the seal hunt remain. Canada encourages people to form their opinions based on the facts.**



### CANADA ...

#### 1 ... supports the tradition of hunting

Canada establishes regulations for hunting in the context of its healthy, abundant wildlife populations. The seal hunt in Canada is not done for sport or leisure. Seals are considered an important natural resource, one that generates a wide range of products - fur, handicrafts, industrial oil, food for human and animal consumption and seal oil capsules rich in Omega 3. Canadian regulations require the fullest possible use of seals.

In 2003, the estimated value of seal-based products was over \$40 million. Canada exports seal products in three forms:

meat, oil and skins. The seal hunt is an important mainstay, bringing in millions of dollars in direct revenue to economically disadvantaged coastal communities.

While recognizing the economic benefits of the hunt for thousands of families in Eastern Canada's rural coastal communities, Canada also takes into account the rights of Canadian Aboriginals and Inuit, for whom the seal hunt is an important right, a source of food, culture and tradition.



#### 2 ... ensures a humane hunt

The world continues to use animal-based food and clothing. Canada works to ensure its animals are killed quickly and humanely by implementing strict regulations. In the case of seals, research shows that the methods used in Canada compare favourably with those used to kill any other wild or domestic animal.



The majority of seals are killed using firearms. Clubs and hakapiks, which originated in the traditions of First Nations and Inuit peoples, are also used and have been found to be the most humane way of hunting seals when ice conditions are suitable.

A study by independent members of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association found that virtually all seals taken during the hunt are in fact killed in a humane manner. Canada requires a clear determination of death (blinking eye reflex test) before seals can be processed.

#### 3 ... prohibits the commercial hunt of seal pups

The seals hunted today must be independent animals, weaned of their mothers. Although gruesome images of nursing seal pup hunting continue to be circulated around the world, in fact, Canada prohibits the commercial hunt of seal pups. Most of the animals are taken at the beater stage of development, after their whitecoat has moulted. Adult seals cannot be harvested when they are in whelping patches or breeding grounds.

#### 4 ... enforces against violations of seal hunt regulations

Fishery Officers closely monitor the hunt to ensure sealers comply with Canada's Marine Mammal Regulations. These officers monitor catches, ensure humane harvesting practices, and enforce regulations

and licence conditions. Canada's enforcement of seal hunt regulations is thorough and comprehensive - it includes: aerial patrols, vessel patrols, dockside inspections of vessels at landing sites and inspections at buying/processing facilities. Observers are also deployed on the ice and on many vessels to monitor compliance with regulations.

Between 1999-2004 there were a total of 379 violations detected in the seal hunt, resulting in 250 warnings and 94 charges, with convictions upheld in 57 cases.

#### 5 ... takes survival of seal species into account



There are six species of seals found in Atlantic Canada. Four of these species-harp, hooded, grey and ringed - may be hunted commercially. These species are not endangered and the number of animals that may be hunted is established in proportion

to the health and abundance of each population.

Scientific studies confirm that Canada's seal hunt has no negative impact on the sustainability of its seal species. The herd is now estimated at more than five million, nearly triple what it was in the 1970's.

#### 6 ... researches seals and their ecosystems

Canada has maintained an active seal research program for many years to achieve a better scientific understanding of seals, such as population dynamics, trends in reproductive performance, survival, migration, diving behaviour and diet analysis.

Today, our leading scientists are studying the seals' interaction with other components in the marine ecosystem, including the relationship between fish stocks and seals. This kind of research not only promotes a better understanding of seals and marine ecosystems, but will help ensure balance in Canada's ongoing resource management following an ecosystem based approach.