

# Europe Votes to Ban Seal Product Trade

Canada threatens to appeal to WTO after move aimed at drastic reduction in annual seal cull

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- [Ian Traynor](#) in Brussels
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## *Canadian seal hunt Photograph: Stewart Cook / Rex Features*

[Europe](#) moved today to halt the clubbing to death of hundreds of thousands of seals every year, when MEPs voted overwhelmingly to ban trading in seal products, hoping that the collapse of the market will drastically reduce the massacre.

The decision to outlaw virtually all trade in seal products was directed mainly at [Canada](#), where the yearly cull kills around 300,000 seals, a practice condemned by many as barbaric.

Canada, which exports several million dollars worth of seal products to the EU, is threatening to take Brussels to the World Trade Organisation because of the ban, which still needs to be endorsed by the EU's 27 national governments. But that support is guaranteed as EU governments agreed the text with the European parliament.

While 90 MEPs voted against the ban or abstained, 550 voted in favour. The trade will be stopped next year.

"This is a political issue that now has its time," said Arlene McCarthy, the Labour MEP. "After a 40-year campaign, Europe has a chance to introduce a ban in all 27 states."

National bans on commercial trading in seal products are already in place in 30 countries including the US, the Netherlands and Italy. Italy is still said to be one of the biggest European importers of seal pelts.

Seal products are also found in Omega 3 'fish oil' pills, leather goods and meat from the Arctic.

The vote came as an EU-Canada summit convened in Prague where the Ottawa government was expected to complain about the ban. Norway has also threatened to take the EU to the [WTO](#).

"The ban does nothing to improve the welfare of hunted seals but sets a dangerous precedent by ignoring WTO rules," said the [International Fur Trade Federation](#).

Its chairman, Andreas Lenhart, said: "MEPs have rushed through bad legislation to garner what they think will be public appeal just before they are up for re-election [next month]."

But opponents of the ban are relatively rare in Europe.

"Cruel and inhumane seal hunting is unacceptable and an EU measure is the best way we can help to end it around the world," said Caroline Flint, the minister for Europe. "It also shows how we can achieve more acting together than alone."

Almost one million seals are culled every year worldwide. McCarthy said the Canadians had slaughtered less than a quarter of the number of seals this year compared to last because trading bans were destroying the market for seal products.

Inuit communities in the Arctic were exempted from the new rules. The marketing of seal products would still be allowed from "hunts traditionally conducted by Inuit and other indigenous communities and which contribute to their subsistence".

Lesley O'Donnell, the EU director of the International Fund for [Animal Welfare](#), said today's vote "hammered the final nail in the coffin of the sealing industry's market in the EU. The world is uniting in opposition to commercial sea hunts. A complete collapse of Canada's commercial seal hunt may now be inevitable."

