

# Seal Hunt Facts

The Canadian commercial seal "hunt" is the largest mass slaughter of marine mammals in the world. Canada intends to kill over 325,000 seals this spring with an additional 10,000 harp seal quota for an aboriginal allowance!

During the 3-year period of 2003-2005, the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) allowed a kill quota of 975,000 baby and adult harp seals and 30,000 adult hood seals.

In 2004, 365,971 seals were slaughtered, and during the 2003 season 283,497 harp seals were killed. In 2002, the sealers slaughtered over 312,000 although the kill quota was set at 275,000. There were no legal consequences for the quota overkill. Instead, the Canadian government rewarded the kill quota violations with an incredible increase of 75,000 seals!



There is no scientific justification for these quotas as the seal counting techniques used amount to little more than guesswork. Further, Canadian author and naturalist (and Sea Shepherd International Chairman), Farley Mowat, estimates that for every seal landed, another is shot and lost under the ice, not to be included in the count. According to the Canadian government, the hunt will not harm seal populations, however, the facts dispute their unfounded claim. When the first European explorers landed on the East coast of Canada, there were an estimated 30 million harp, hood, and gray seals (harp seals made-up 80%, or 24M, of that number). Because of the reckless management of the hunt in the past, Canada allowed the number of harp seals to drop to 1.8 million in the early 1970s. Now they claim that a "healthy" population of 5.2 million exists but in the same breath admit that they have not had a peer-reviewed population survey since 1999. They predict that the anticipated survey's population number will be lower than their current claim, and further, their "management" plan still allows for the numbers to drop far below the 1970s level.



Scientists and environmentalists dispute the Canadian government's population claims, and believe the hunt is a threat to the survival of the species. In the last four years alone, over a million harp seals have been killed. While the world waits for a new population survey, seals are wantonly slaughtered.



Clearly, the government of Canada is willing to sacrifice everything (from their national reputation, to the wrath of the taxpayers, to economic hardship from boycotts) to continue their seal hunt which is nothing more than a make-work project for out-of-work fishermen.

After decades of this mismanagement and the resulting collapse of the East coast cod industry, the Canadian DFO has declared war on the seals in hopes that massive seal kills will bring back the cod and keep their disgruntled fishermen working. In fact, cod is not a major food source of the harp and hood seal diet. Further, recent evidence

suggests that killing seals contributes to bacterial infestation on the ocean floor which leads to hypoxia, a condition in which patches of ocean lose all the dissolved oxygen and are unable to sustain cod or fish or marine life of any kind. However, these facts seem to have been brushed aside by the DFO in their efforts to justify and continue the slaughter.



The Canadian government looks for as many avenues as possible to profit from their annual, government-subsidized slaughter. Currently, Canada exports the following seal products: sealskins (furskins/pelts and leather), seal oil, and seal meat. Unfortunately, due to a revived fashion trend, the demand for seal pelts has sky-rocketed, especially in Europe. Harpseals.org reports that high fashion designers such as Prada and Dolce & Gabbana are selling sealskin apparel. Other companies selling seal fur products include [Odette Leblanc Collection](#), [Petit Nordand](#), and [Pajar](#). Canada sold pelts to 11 countries in 2004 with Norway, Germany, Greenland, and China purchasing the largest quantities. Other buying countries were Finland, Denmark, France, Hong Kong, Greece, South Korea, and Russia.

On the other hand, seal meat sales are not going as well for Canada. Seal meat is generally considered to be inedible and unfit for human consumption. While there is a small market in Newfoundland for the seal flippers (for seal flipper pie), most of the rest of the very small amount of meat found in the slaughtered seal, if utilized at all, would be purchased by pet food and fur farm industries. In 2004, only Taiwan and South Korea purchased seal meat.



Clearly Canada is not satisfied with the underperformance of seal meat sales as according to their own website, they continue to spend taxpayers money to try to peddle seal meat and are still seeking more places to sell the 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. [Note: "beaters" are seal pups who are approximately 4 weeks old]*



Canada, however, is optimistic about the prospects of sales of seal oil and is



looking to increase their sales in this area. The way they are doing that is by falsely promoting seal oil capsules as a healthy source of Omega-3 (an essential fatty acid). As they report on their website:

*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.*



seal oil capsules

"R&D" (Research and Development) means more Canadian tax dollars going to the cause of killing seals.

Sea Shepherd has a different take on the selling of seal oil. It is Sea Shepherd's opinion that Canada is misleading consumers by marketing seal oil in the health food industry as a "health" alternative. Seal oil contains bioaccumulative PCBs. A known animal carcinogen, PCBs produce health affects such as skin ailments called chloracne, reproductive disorders, liver disease, and other problems. PCBs are stored in body fat and are also dangerously bioaccumulated in the foodchain. Resistant to degradation, PCBs persist for many years in the environment. What Canada markets as benefits of seal oil is the Omega-3 and essential fatty acids - Sea Shepherd recommends these health supplements should be taken in plant form, such as hemp and flaxseed oils. Unfortunately, in 2006, Costco Wholesale Corporation decided to sell seal oil capsules their store in St. John's, Newfoundland. When a Sea Shepherd representative provided the



company with information about the sealing industry, and in particular, the killing methods of sealers Costco executives originally promised to pull the capsules but very soon after they changed positions and restocked their shelves and continued to sell the

product. [For more information read [Costco Cannot be Trusted](#)]

Many are under the impression that this cruel and inhumane slaughter was stopped for good. [Anti-seal hunt campaigns by Sea Shepherd](#) and other organizations together with pressure from Europe to boycott Canadian products brought the industry to a halt. In 1984, after the European Parliament banned the import of baby harp seal pelts, the

Canadian seal hunt was reduced to a limited landsmen hunt.

This has all changed as the heavily-subsidized seal hunt is being promoted by the Canadian government as necessary to bring back fish stocks on the eastern seaboard. We know the cod fisheries were closed down because of years of fisheries mismanagement, and now they must have their scapegoat: The harp and hood seals.



The DFO's position is that the harp seal is a major predator of the cod, therefore, insists seals must

die so that the cod populations can increase. Yet, there is no scientific justification for this position. Dr. David Lavigne, the world's leading authority on harp seals, has created a food-chain chart that illustrates a complex interaction of more than eighty animals and plants existing on the Grand Banks of Newfoundland. According to Dr. Lavigne, harp seals only utilize young cod for 3 percent of their diet. Of greater concern should be the fact that many of the other fish that comprise the remaining 97 percent of the seals' diet are themselves predators on young cod. Remove the harp seal, and the return of the cod could be hindered - not helped - by a significant increase in predatory fish hunting for cod. We must remember this is the DFO which is responsible for the mismanagement and ultimate collapse of the cod fishery. Why should we expect them to manage the seals any better? When the first European explorers landed on the East coast of Canada there was no shortage of cod, and there were an estimated 30 million seals. Now, with cod populations at less than 1% of pre-Columbian levels, the seal has become the scapegoat for the excesses of the Canadian and foreign drag trawler fleets that plundered the Grand Banks for decades, and left very little behind.

In 1993, Sea Shepherd brought worldwide attention to the mismanagement of these East coast fisheries when Captain Watson took the ship Cleveland Amory to the Grand Banks. He chased foreign trawlers out of the area where they were fishing illegally and cut the trawl net of a Cuban vessel. The Canadian government arrested Watson and a lengthy trial ensued (in which Watson was eventually found not guilty of the major charges brought against him). What is interesting about this event is that Watson and Sea Shepherd were cheered and thanked by many local fishermen who were happy to see that someone was doing what their own government should have done. Sea Shepherd's goals have not changed - the cessation of overfishing and end of the Canadian seal "hunt." As Captain Watson writes in his book Seal Wars, "The war against the Canadian seal hunt is more than a protest. It is a crusade to bring about harmony between the natural world and humanity. All of us who oppose it are dedicated to the protection of life and the abolition of cruelty."

