

Fact Sheet

S. Res. 118 - H. Res. 427 – A Bipartisan Call to End the Canadian Commercial Seal Hunt

On November 15, 2004, the Canadian government launched a commercial hunt for seals in the waters off the east coast of Canada. This hunt was the latest since the government's decision in 2003 to approve a three-year allowable catch of just under 1 million seals – the largest seal quota in history.

In response to the ongoing assault on Canada's seal populations, Senators Carl Levin (D-MI) and Susan Collins (R-ME) have reintroduced a bipartisan U. S. Senate resolution (S. Res. 118), urging the Canadian government to end the commercial seal hunt. Representatives Tom Lantos (D-CA) and Christopher Shays (R-CT) have introduced a companion resolution (H. Res. 427) in the U.S. House.

By the end of the 2004-2005 hunt, more than 317,000 harp seals had been brutally clubbed or shot to death for their fur, bringing the three-year total kill up to nearly a million seals. The last time sealers killed this many seals – in the 1950s and 1960s – nearly two-thirds of the harp seal population was wiped out.

The horrors of this large-scale massacre are compounded by evidence that a large number of seals are skinned alive. In 2001, an independent panel of veterinary experts performed post mortems on seal carcasses at the hunt. In 42% of cases they studied, they concluded the seal did not show enough evidence of cranial injury to even guarantee unconsciousness—much less death—at the time of skinning.

Nearly all (96%) of the seals killed in the commercial seal hunt are under 3 months of age; the majority are less than one month old.

The Economics of the Hunt

In Newfoundland, where over 90% of sealers live, income from the seal hunt accounts for less than one percent of the province's economy. Less than one percent of Newfoundlanders participate in the seal hunt.

The Humane Society of the United States takes no issue with subsistence seal hunting undertaken by aboriginal people. Our concern is exclusively with commercial seal hunting carried out by commercial fishermen, who participate in several fisheries throughout the year. Over the past seven years, revenues from sealing have on average accounted for less than 3 percent of their annual incomes. The balance comes from other fisheries such as crab, shrimp and lobster.

The fishery in Newfoundland has never been wealthier, today earning \$150 million more each year than prior to the 1992 cod collapse. Individual Newfoundland fishermen annually earn more than \$40,000 in fishing income from all sources.

The landed value of the seal hunt, at \$16 million in 2004, is dwarfed by the \$3 billion from Canadian seafood exports to the United States in 2003.

Global Opposition Continues to Grow

The governments of countries around the world have publicly condemned the Canadian commercial seal hunt, and have put their words into action by prohibiting the sale of all seal products.

Public opinion polls have shown that 85% of Canadians oppose the killing of seals less than one year of age. Other recent polls found that 79% of American voters oppose Canada's seal hunt, and that nearly 80% of people in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany, and France who are aware of the Canadian seal hunt oppose it, as well.



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