



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY**  
OF THE UNITED STATES

## **Fast Facts on Canada's Commercial Seal Hunt**

### **About the Hunt:**

- Canada's commercial seal hunt is the largest slaughter of marine mammals on Earth. In just 10 years, over two million seals have been killed for their fur. This does not include the tens of thousands of injured seals who have died below the ice.
- 97 percent of the seals killed in the past 10 years have been less than three months of age. Many of these defenseless seals did not yet know how to swim.
- In 2001, an independent veterinary panel concluded that the seal hunt results in considerable and unacceptable suffering. They noted that in 42 percent of the seals examined there was not enough evidence of cranial injury to even guarantee unconsciousness at the time of skinning.
- Harp seals rely on sea ice to give birth to and nurse their pups and they need the ice to remain intact until the pups are strong enough to survive in open water.
- Climate change has caused sea ice to diminish at an alarming rate off Canada's east coast in the harp seal birthing grounds. Sea ice formation has been well below average for each of the past 15 years, with 2010 having the lowest sea ice formation on record. The Canadian government has estimated up to 100% mortality in harp seal birthing areas when the sea ice did not form or melted too early in the season. Despite this, the Canadian government continues to authorize massive harp seal quotas each year.
- The Humane Society of the United States takes no issue with subsistence seal hunting by aboriginal people. Our concern is exclusively with commercial seal hunting.

### **The Economics of the Hunt:**

- In Newfoundland, where more than 90 percent of sealers live, income from the seal hunt accounts for less than one half of one percent of the province's economy. Less than one percent of Newfoundlanders participate in the seal hunt.
- Sealers are commercial fishermen who earn only a small fraction of their annual incomes from killing seals—the remainder is from commercial fisheries such as crab, shrimp and lobster.
- Seafood exports to the United States bring about \$2.5 billion CDN to Canada's fishing industry each year. In contrast, the landed value of the seal hunt was roughly \$1 million a year in 2009 and 2010. Canadian government estimates indicate that the cost of enforcement at the slaughter to be up to \$3.6 million annually.

## **Corporate Engagement in the Protect Seals Campaign:**

- March 2005, as part of the Protect Seals campaign, The Humane Society of the United States began encouraging American grocery and restaurant chains to shift purchasing away from Canadian seafood products until Canada ends the seal hunt. US companies have the power to help shift Canada toward responsible marine stewardship.
- Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans says that it will shut down the commercial seal hunt for good if and when Canada's fishing industry asks it to do so. To date, no Canadian seafood company has spoken out against the seal hunt.
- Over 5,500 restaurants and grocery stores (in addition to 650,000 individuals) have joined the Protect Seals boycott and are making clear that they think participation in the Canadian annual commercial seal hunt is an unacceptable business practice undertaken by Canada's fishing industry.
- In 2012, an iPhone app was launched empowering consumers to help save seals in danger. The app, called Protect Seals, allows users to locate restaurants and food suppliers who support boycotting Canadian seafood products until the country ends its annual slaughter of baby seals.
- Mario Batali, Michelle Bernstein, Richard Blais, Terrance Brennan, Cat Cora, Dominique Crenn, Carla Hall, Gabrielle Hamilton, Aaron London, Rafael Lunetta, Michael Mina, Nancy Oakes, Michel Richard, Aarón Sanchez, Kerry Simon, Fabio Viviani, Tre Wilcox are among the hundreds of passionate chefs working with us.
- Some of the companies participating in the Protect Seals boycott include: BI-LO Supermarkets, Bon Appétit Management Company, Harris Teeter, Houston's Restaurants, Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville Cafés, Legal Sea Foods, Lowe's Food Stores, Oceanaire Seafood Rooms, Ted Turner's restaurant chain – Ted's Montana Grill, The Fresh Market, Trader Joe's, Whole Foods Markets, and WinCo Foods.
- The primary ways in which companies participate in the Protect Seals boycott are to do one of the following - pledge to avoid Canadian snow crab, seafood from Canada's sealing provinces, or seafood from all of Canada until the hunt ends for good.
- Exports of seafood from Canada are down considerably since the start of the Protect Seals boycott. The impact of the campaign is causing Canadian fishermen to think twice about on-going support for and participation in the commercial seal hunt.

## **What the Public Thinks:**

- Nearly 70 percent of Canadians holding an opinion are opposed to the commercial seal hunt outright. Only 4 percent indicated that they would be very upset if the hunt ended. (EnviroNics Research, 2005)
- A 2002 public opinion poll of registered voters in the U.S. shows that 75% of registered Republicans and 78% of registered Democrats oppose Canada's commercial seal hunt. (Penn Schoen)

- A 2010 poll conducted by Ipsos Reid revealed that half of Newfoundland sealers holding an opinion support a federal buyout of the commercial sealing industry, which would involve fishermen and vessel owners being compensated for their sealing licenses, and money being invested in economic alternatives for affected communities.

**Global Response:**

- The United States has repeatedly passed unanimous House and Senate resolutions urging Canada to end its commercial seal hunt.
- In 2009, the 27-nation European Union banned its trade in products of commercial seal hunts. The United States has prohibited seal product trade since 1971 and Mexico and Croatia ended their trade in 2006.
- In 2009, Russia ended its own commercial slaughter of baby seals. In 2011, they, along with Belarus and Kazakhstan, took it a step further and banned the trade in harp seal pelts. Russia was reportedly responsible for the bulk of seal fur exports from Canada in some years.

**The Humane Society of the United States is the nation's largest animal protection organization – backed by 11 million Americans, or one of every 28. For more than a half-century, The HSUS has been fighting for the protection of all animals through advocacy, education and hand-on programs. Celebrating animals and confronting cruelty – on the web at [humanesociety.org](http://humanesociety.org).**