

History

- Sealing has thrived in Newfoundland and Labrador for hundreds of years. For the Dorset people of Labrador, seals meant survival in the most basic sense of the word. Evidence shows early subsistence through the use of the harpoon. Indeed, to the Inuit, seals still provide a significant resource around which they can continue to shape their culture.
- For many early residents of this province, the inshore seal fishery generated income that enabled them to feed their families until the summer cod fishery began. In the mid-1700s, European demand for seal oil and skins led to the development of a commercial inshore seal harvest which reached its first peak when almost 128,000 seals were landed.
- In the late 1700s, the demand for seal products gave birth to an offshore fishery with wooden sailing ships. The industry grew, bringing a great deal of foreign investment and the growth of secondary employment in such trades as shipbuilding, carpentry, and refining. Refiners extract the oil from seal blubber. The early to mid-1800s saw an increase in vessel size, as well as an increase in the number of individuals involved in the fishery, which contributed to landings of over 200,000 seals.
- In 1914, Newfoundland and Labrador experienced two sealing disasters. Seventy-eight men were lost from the *SS Newfoundland*, and 174 sealers were lost from the *SS Southern Cross* as it sank while returning to Newfoundland from the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Throughout the world wars there was a large decline in the commercial seal fishery. Many of the vessels which participated in the fishery were brought into service for the defence of the country. In the 1950s, there was a limited harvest with an average of 310,000 seals landed.
- In 1965, the Government of Canada implemented the first seal protection regulations. The regulations gave clear definition to humane harvesting. All harvesters were required to possess a seal harvesting license. This same year, fisheries officers manned vessels greater than 65 feet in



length and Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) began conducting regular dockside monitoring to validate landings data and ensure compliance with quota restrictions.

- In 1985, DFO introduced regulations that specified the means and tools to harvest the animal in the most humane manner. In 1987, in accordance with the Malouf Commission (a report which established the future policy on the management of the seal harvest), DFO adopted a policy to prohibit the harvest of whitecoat and blueback seals for commercial purposes. The use of vessels larger than 65 feet for sealing was also prohibited in 1987.
- The Government of Canada introduced the first seal harvest management plan. In 1993, the Marine Mammal Regulations were adopted. These regulations focused on furthering the humane practices of the fishery. Regulations were introduced regarding proper gauge ammunitions and more stringent rules regarding the means to quickly render the animal unconscious. In 1996, the market demand for seals increased, the harvest became more significant and higher quotas were established.
- Today, as in the past, the seal harvest remains an integral part of the rural economy. The focus remains on a sustainable harvest based on solid science, the full utilization of the animal, and humane harvesting methods with zero tolerance for any inhumane practices.