

Environmental Significance

- The end of the commercial sealing industry in Newfoundland and Labrador will have a serious impact on the ecosystem. With about eight million harp seals currently off the east coast, the future cost to the international seafood industry will be devastating. An average harp seal consumes 1.4 metric tonnes of fish per year. This equates to more than 12 million tonnes of fish per year being consumed by seals, given their numbers at last census. As an effective predator, it is clear this consumption by seals is having significant influence on the ecosystem.
- Without a commercial seal harvest to help bring balance to the marine ecosystem, other resource management initiatives to help fish stocks recover will have to be considered. For example, in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the federal government is considering a cull of grey seals (population 400,000) as they are seriously impacting the recovery of fish stocks. The harvest of seals for economic development purposes is the best option for population control and would not conflict with international agreements regarding the sustainable and wise use of the world's natural resources. Given the size of the population, the situation related to harp seals is much more severe than for grey seals. Without a reasonable level of commercial harvest, there will likely be a need to control the size and growth of the population.
- The seal harvest is important for reasons of environmental protection and conservation. The consumption of fish by harp seals is more than 10 times Canada's total annual seafood exports. For this reason, seals are impacting the recovery of fish stocks. They must be managed as part of the marine ecosystem. This happens in the European Union and should happen in Canada. It is only reasonable and logical to harvest the resource for commercial purposes rather than conducting a cull of the seal herds for no commercial purpose.



Humane Harvest

- The Canadian seal harvest is one of the best managed harvests of animals anywhere in the world. Fisheries and Oceans Canada monitors the hunt on the water, in the air and on land.
- International veterinarians have reviewed the harvest and noted that it operates with a low level (about five percent) of unnecessary pain and suffering for the animal. This is in fact lower than killing practices in animal processing operations.
- To further ensure that seals are harvested humanely, the industry has been increasing its level of training for humane harvesting of seals. The goal is to have mandatory certification of professional sealers. This designation will require the participation of sealers in training session on humane harvesting methods. The Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture has partnered with sealers, the federal government and other interest groups (Fish, Food and Allied Workers, Canadian Sealers Association and the Newfoundland and Labrador Professional Fish Harvesters Certification Board) to implement these training sessions. To date, over 3,500 sealers have been trained.