

Seal hunt ice conditions improving

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With the harp seal hunt about a month away, officials with Fisheries and Oceans Canada say ice conditions for the hunt in the Gulf of St. Lawrence are looking better than last year.



Ice conditions have improved significantly in the last two weeks, says Fisheries and Oceans biologist Mike Hammill. (CBC)

Seals need ice to give birth on. Fisheries and Oceans biologist Mike Hammill told CBC News Tuesday ice conditions were looking poor just a few weeks ago.

"I was down in the P.E.I. area about two weeks ago and the ice looked like it was very poor," said Hammill.

Since then, it looks like there has been some development of ice along the north side and around the Magdalen Islands. So it looks now like the ice may be OK. We would expect pupping to start probably early next week."

In poor ice conditions last year, sealers took only about 10 per cent of the 400,000 animal quota. Market conditions were also poor, and that contributed to the small harvest.

While ice conditions are improving, market conditions could be getting worse. Russia, which has traditionally been the market for about 90 per cent Canada's harp seal products, has closed the door to imports under pressure from animal rights groups.

There are hopes China could be a market for harp seal products, but no deal has been finalized.

Federal government officials will arrive on P.E.I. at the end of the week to determine where they will set up their base for the hunt.