


## Sealers keeping eye on ice, markets

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**SYDNEY — A Cape Breton fishermen's association will be watching ice and markets around the world while deciding whether to hunt for harp**

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The North of Smokey/Inverness South Fishermen's Association has a quota of 5,000 harp seals a year in each year year because of poor ice conditions.

Spokesman Robert Courtney said Monday ice conditions don't appear to be very promising so far this year, although ice conditions for the latter part of March or later when the harp seal hunt is underway. Courtney said he has heard s very "prosperous" right now.

"We don't know what's going to happen," he said.

"The boats are still in the water, the hunters are ready to go and we could go within one day. If we decide we are goi nothing at this time for markets."

Fisheries and Oceans Canada has approved a developmental quota that was sought by the fishermen's group to set Breton that could also handle grey seal pelts and products.

This year's quota for the harp seal hunt off Canada's east coast hasn't yet been set. Last year, the quota was set at said only about 38,000 were killed. The slump was blamed on shrinking world markets and poor ice conditions in the coast of Newfoundland, where the seals need large ice pans to give birth to their young.

The federal government meanwhile confirmed in December that the world's largest buyer of Canadian seal products - importing harp seal pelts. The European Union banned importing seal products in 2010, and the federal government t the Chinese market to Canadian seal meat, including grey seals.

Last month, Courtney said a grey seal hunt on Hay Island off Cape Breton is looking doubtful this year because of a

Sealers have a short window of opportunity for the Hay Island hunt, which is determined by how long seal pups born that window is closing, said Courtney.

Fisheries and Oceans says on its website the majority of harp sealing occurs between late March and mid-May, beg the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence, and about the second week in April off Newfoundland in an area known as the Frc

The timing of harvest activities in the northern Gulf of St. Lawrence depends largely on the movement of ice floes on commercial harvest in this area is in early April, according to the department.

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