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By Lahja Nashuuta Published: 20120511

Seal culling furore in Nam

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Windhoek - The government of Namibia is resisting pressure from conservati to put an end to seal culling in the country's coastal waters.

The seal-harvesting season runs from July to mid-November. Lobbyists say t government makes around US\$9 million annually from some 100 000 tourists want to see seals in their natural habitats, but earns just US\$50 000 from sea culling.

However, the state points out that it is necessary to control seal populations because they can potentially deplete the fishing industry.

Fishing is the second-highest contributor to Namibia's GDP after mining and constitutes the largest employer in the country.

According to the Atlantic Canadian Anti-Sealing Coalition, the Namibian seal harvest is the second largest commercial seal hunt in the world.

Namibia, Norway and Canada are the leading players in the industry.

But Seals Alert SA and Seals of Namibia – anti-culling lobbies - reject the government's arguments.

They describe the industry as cruel, inhumane, wasteful and violent.

In the past, conservationists have unsuccessfully lobbied for an international boycott of Namibian products as well appealing to foreign tourists not to visit country if the government fails to stop culling.

Seals Alert representative, Patrick Dickens, told Namibian media this past we

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that the government should stop the annual cull and let seals return to their original home islands to form wild colonies.

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Dickens further criticised the local SPCA for condoning seal harvesting despite having constitutional powers to prevent the practice.

Under the Animal Protection Act of 1962, Namibia SPCA has the authority to arrest and detain anyone for animal cruelty.

Dickens made the unsubstantiated claim that since 1994 “this species (seals) has suffered several mass die-offs where all the pups starved to death and a third to half of the adults died as well.

The last die-off admitted by the government was in 2006”.