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Grey Seal Cull: Making the Ethical Choice

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On October 23, 2012, the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans tabled [a report recommending the removal of grey seals](#) in order to aid the recovery of cod and other groundfish stocks.

This study was expected since we are currently facing a serious problem: the risk of cod disappearing forever from our planet. Other species -- plaice, winter skate and white hake -- are also at varying degrees of risk.

After hearing from scientists, sealers, and animal welfare groups, my colleagues on the committee and I are convinced that grey seals, whose population has grown considerably, are one of the factors -- but not the only factor -- preventing cod stock recovery. We, therefore, recommended that the government remove 15,000 grey seals a year for four years out of a total population of 330,000 to 410,000 animals. Removal must be done humanely by experienced professionals under scientific supervision. In addition, the Liberal members on the committee insisted that the government develop a market for seal-derived products.

Obviously, this news provoked vegetarian lobby groups who advocate against the seal hunt -- indeed, all hunting, fishing and everything and anything remotely related to animals.

Their main argument is that there is no market for seal-derived products. Yet it would be entirely different if these lobby groups didn't do everything in their power to close these markets, because these markets do exist! These groups lobbied European parliamentarians and won a [boycott on Canadian seal products in 2009](#). And when Canada announced in 2011 that it had entered into an agreement with China to sell its products from the seal hunt, the lobbyists mobilized no fewer than 50 organizations to derail the agreement.

Again, under pressure from these groups, the Russian government declared a boycott of Canadian seal pelts in 2011. Yet the Russian government, by announcing in February 2012 that canned seal meat could be sold in Russian supermarkets, proved that a market for seal-derived products does exist! Moreover, this market is so successful that Canadian products were exported to 35 countries between 2005 and 2011, bringing in US\$70 million.

Do they believe that without a market there will be no seal harvest? Quite frankly, that is absurd! Scotland has managed its seal herds for decades by harvesting an annual quota. The fact that Europe, of which Scotland is a member, voted to boycott Canadian seal products hasn't stopped it from pursuing its own management. On March 15, 2012, the U.S. government lifted protection on sea lions in California to manage the herd threatening salmon stocks. Unfortunately, however, there is no market for seal or sea lion products in the United States, as it too has boycotted these products under pressure from vegetarian lobby groups.

So if closing markets does not protect animals, why shut them down? Simply to deal with powerful vegetarian lobby groups whose goal is to obtain a ban on animal-derived products with a bigger goal of a ban on all forms of hunting, fishing and livestock production, and, ultimately, making animal rights equal to human rights.

Morality: it is more ethical to humanely and sustainably harvest animals and subsequently market them, then it is to harvest them only to burn or let them rot. With or without a market, humans, who are part of the food chain, will always be predators and regulators -- unless humankind becomes vegetarian. This utopia which anti-seal-hunt lobbyists no doubt believe will happen one day comes at the cost of suffocating our regions by killing existing jobs and markets.

WARNING: GRAPHIC

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