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POLITICS

Animal welfare respected in seal hunt: Study

5:51 pm, November 6th, 2012



SEAL HUNTERS ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE HUNT ON HAY ISLAND, NOVA SCOTIA Credits: PAUL DARROW/QMI AGENCY

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OTTAWA -- A pair of researchers -- one Canadian and one Australian -- have given the much-maligned seal hunt a seal of approval.

In a new study published in the *Animal Welfare Journal*, two veterinarians conclude that "based on current practices, there is no reliable evidence that the Canadian harp seal hunt differs from other forms of exploitation of wildlife resources from the perspective of animal welfare."

Gil Theriault, co-ordinator for the Seals and Sealing Network, said Tuesday that previous researchers who slammed the hunt for animal cruelty had never observed the cull first hand. "It's a little ridiculous," he said, noting the research pair had both spent time observing the seal hunt.

Not so, says the Humane Society Canada, pointing to another recent joint Canada-UK study published in October, which came to the opposite conclusion about the seal hunt.

That research, published in the *Marine Policy Journal*, concluded that seal hunt bans were justified on humane grounds. Still, Theriault added that controlling seal populations is a growing concern in many countries, including the European Union, which banned Canadian seal products from its market in 2009.

Without a viable commercial market in the region any cull "will simply be a burden to the taxpayers," he said.

Green MP Elizabeth May said her party has traditionally opposed the hunt but that the policy is now under review. Still, "shooting and trapping can be made relatively more humane. We don't think they're there yet on the seal hunt," she said.

In recent years, the Canadian government has looked at ways to promote better sealing practices to ensure minimal or no pain inflicted on the animals during the hunt. The seal hunt is the world's largest slaughter of marine mammals and has been the target of significant criticism from animal-welfare activists and a number of foreign governments.

Canada recently challenged the seal product ban by the EU and other government at World Trade Organization and is waiting for its decision.

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