

Culling 70,000 seals over 4 years won't bring back cod: group

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A Senate committee's proposal for an East Coast seal cull of some 70,000 animals over four years "is not going to help bring back the cod," says an animal welfare group.

The committee report, issued Tuesday, makes a number of recommendations to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans on how to approach a stalled cod recovery in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The cod population has failed to recover despite a ban on large-scale commercial fishing in the area.

Proponents of the cull say data shows that as the seal populations grows, the numbers of cod decrease, making the killing necessary.

But others say a cull is not the answer, arguing there are factors keeping cod stocks down other than seals with big appetites.

"It's not going to help cod stocks recover," Sheryl Fink of the International Fund for Animal Welfare told CTV's Power Play.

"We know that our cod and ground fish are in a serious state. And we know why, because of over-fishing and mismanagement. Killing seals is not the answer, and it's not going to help bring back the cod."

The committee has been studying the issue for nearly a year, and its report makes a number of recommendations, including research over the course of the cull to ensure it is having the desired effect.

Conservative Sen. Fabian Manning said Wednesday research shows a correlation between diminished cod populations and high seal numbers. Manning said each 800-pound animal eats between 1.5 and 2 tons of fish per year, which is "playing an important negative part" in the cod recovery.

"Grey seals, they're not going to McDonald's," Manning told Power Play. "They're eating fish, and we believe they're eating a tremendous amount of cod."

Manning said the report recommends using trained, experienced harvesters to determine how more parts of the seal could be put to use, such as blubber.

Dion Dakins, the head of the world's largest seal processing plant, Caribou, supports the report's recommendations. However, he said the federal government has not approved the sale of seal products, which the report also recommends.

The European Union banned seal products in 2010. In late 2011, China and the Canadian government to allow seal meat to be sold there, an agreement that would allow the sale of seal products in the country.

PHOTOS



A female grey seal moves over thin ice near the shore in Canso, N.S. on Thursday, Jan. 20, 2005. (Andrew Vaughan / THE CANADIAN PRESS)



Sheryl Fink of the International Fund for Animal Welfare speaks to CTV's Power Play on Wednesday, Oct. 24, 2012.

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