

**INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

## Canada keeping tabs on EU's plan to cull seal population

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Europe is facing a seal-shooting controversy in its own backyard, as concern over fish stocks and nuisance seals led the European Parliament to approve a plan to “manage” its seal population.

Canada's sealing industry says the recent events are highly hypocritical given Europe's condemnation of Canada's commercial seal hunt.

Reports out of Scotland, Ireland and England in recent weeks have focused on growing tension between seal advocates and the fishing industry, which argues seal populations need to be culled in order to protect fish stocks.

Local environmentalists are condemning a Scottish government-approved cull that has granted licences to kill 878 grey seals and 289 common seals this year.

Beyond the debate over approved culls, there are also reports of seals being killed without a licence.

Last month, the European Parliament weighed in, approving a resolution on a “Common Fisheries Policy” that calls on the European Commission “to investigate the reduction in fish stocks owing to natural predators such as sea lions, seals and cormorants, and to draw up and implement management plans to regulate these populations in co-operation with the affected Member States.”

This is the same European Parliament that voted in 2009 to ban commercial seal products, a decision Canada is fighting before the World Trade Organization.

The European Union has been one of the harshest critics of the Canadian seal hunt and the European sealing debate comes at a key moment in relations between Canada and Europe.

More than 100 members of the European Parliament have vowed that unless Canada drops its WTO challenge, they will refuse to vote in favour of a Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement that is expected to be signed between Canada and the EU this year.

The debate in Europe is being watched closely in Ottawa and by Canada's seal industry, which has seen the value of its industry decimated in recent years partly due to the EU seal ban.

Rob Cahill, who speaks on behalf of commercial sealers as the executive director of the Fur Institute

of Canada, said the culls in Europe are both hypocritical and wasteful, because the killed seals can only be used for personal consumption and cannot be turned into commercial products because of the EU's 2009 ban.

"It's obviously ironic now that after they've banned the trade of the product because they felt their citizens were opposed to its use, they are now embarking on a management plan for seals at the EU-wide level," said Mr. Cahill.

A Canadian government spokesperson for Fisheries and Oceans Canada told The Globe that the department "has been following with interest reports about the growing concern by some EU member states on the potential impact of seal populations on their marine ecosystems."

Spokesperson Melanie Carkner wrote in an e-mail that Canada's fishing industry also has a "serious concern" about the impact of seals.

A Conservative-dominated Senate fisheries committee has been studying the links between fish stocks and seals for months and is currently drafting a report.

Rebecca Aldworth, executive director of Humane Society International/Canada, said both the Canadian Senate hearings and the EU resolution are not grounded in science, and that her organization has raised its objections with European parliamentarians.

Ms. Aldworth said it's important to note that government culls affect a much smaller number of seals than the commercial seal hunt.

"I don't believe that the European Union is being hypocritical in any way," she said. "It was restricting an activity that is perceived by Europeans to be inherently inhumane, because of the scale of the killing, because of the environment that the killing happens in and because of the speed at which the killing occurs, and those are factors that are unique to commercial seal hunts around the world."