

Home > Straight Talk > **EUROPEAN SEALS GOOD. CANADIAN SEALS BAD.**

STRAIGHT TALK

SIMON KENT

European seals good. Canadian seals bad.

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SIMON KENT | QMI AGENCY

European seals good. Canadian seals bad.

It sounds like a line from George Orwell's dystopian novel Animal Farm when the animals take over the farmyard and one of their original Seven Commandments includes the mantra: four legs good, two legs bad.

Except it has nothing to do with fiction and everything to do with fact.

After years of publicly excoriating Canada for its seal cull and banning any seal product from entering European Union (EU) markets, the EU has had a dramatic volte-face.

It has commissioned its own study with a view to allowing commercial sealing in its member states — but made no move to repeal the ban on seal products that is still binding on Canada.

The irony isn't lost on Frank Pinhorn, the executive director of the Canadian Sealers Association.

"Where do I start on this," Pinhorn said with an exasperated sigh. "Is it the hypocrisy or just the plain unfairness of it all?"

"Apparently some EU states haven't even waited for the study to be complete. I know they started culling seals in Scotland this week because salmon farmers

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say they must protect their livelihood. They want to guard their salmon crops — which is just the same argument we have used here in Canada all along with our cod.

"I haven't seen any media images of Scottish seals being killed, either. The way the same emotive pictures are shown every year against Canada and our culling, even though we use the same humane methods they do in Europe.

"Now the EU looks like it will approve seal trading amongst its members which will allow them to dramatically lift seal culling numbers but keep the door shut on Canada. It is a joke."

Pinhorn is not alone in calling out the EU for hypocrisy. He says his members naturally enough feel the same and believe they are being used as a pawn in a global trade war.

The fight has been simmering off and on for a generation but went very public when the EU voted in 2009 to ban commercial seal products and Canada decided to challenge in the World Trade Organization (WTO).

More than 100 EU member states now say that unless Canada withdraws its challenge they will not ratify a Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement expected to be signed between the EU and

Canada before the end of 2012.

Pinhorn calls that threat "blackmail" and a "denial of natural justice that robs Canadian sealers of a livelihood" while letting Europeans do as they please.

"The European Union and its parliamentarians seems to be very selective about who they like to bully when it comes to sealing, " Pinhorn said. "They seem more determined to protect their own than to enter into a debate on the subject.

"I mean, seal culling will continue in places like Sweden, Scotland and Finland where it is defended on the grounds it is something they have always done.

"Now they are announcing a study to possibly broaden that harvest but remain as intent as ever to indulge in an emotive - and costly -- exercise in shaming Canada."

There is some movement to fight an expansion in seal culling across Europe.

The Seal Protection Action Group in Scotland (SPAG) last month condemned an increase in seal shootings in Scotland for the first six months of this year, the second year of a controversial government seal licence scheme.

SPAG makes the distinction however of not calling for a boycott of domestic seal products in the EU and Scotland has never been threatened with reprisals or trade sanctions.

Despite the opposition of SPAG, Scottish government figures show there is plenty of harvesting in its waters with 201 grey seals and 41 common seals shot in the first six months of 2012 compared to 180 grey and 37 common seals shot in the equivalent period in 2011.

The shooting of an additional 21 grey and four common seals represents a 10% increase, even though fewer licences and lower quotas were announced last year by the Scottish government in an effort to dampen the cull.

"The Scottish government made a point of highlighting a reduction in the number of seals that could be shot this year," said Andy Ottaway of SPAG, "but it is misleading a very concerned public if the number of seals actually being shot is on the increase, especially as shooting is only supposed to be a resort of last measure."

Rebecca Aldworth, executive director of the Humane Society International/Canada agrees. She says her organization remains as opposed to any reopening of commercial seal culling in the EU as it is in Canada because

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the science does not support it.

"I think both the Canadian government and the Canadian Sealers Association deliberately try and confuse the argument," Aldworth said. "When you look at the science behind the culling and commercial harvesting in Canada, it is just not supportable.

"Also, we know that the majority of Canadians oppose seal culling. Our own research, which is freely available to anyone, shows that 86% of Canadians oppose the killing of seals and have no use for the products.

"To frame the argument as one of Canada versus the EU is just disingenuous. It is wrong. It is also trying to bring emotion to a debate that is highly charged enough already."

The last word goes to Frank Pinhorn. He says seal hunt critics are too focused on the emotion and less on the livelihoods of his "honest, hard working members."

"If you ever went inside an abattoir, believe me you would never eat beef or lamb again. I know that for a fact. Do you honestly feel a baby lamb being killed or a veal calf is somehow more or less humane than killing a seal?"

"We now use highly skilled marksmen for the task and act as quickly and efficiently as possible.

"Maybe it is because of the inherent cuteness of seals and the fact that people like the way they look that makes them want to ban it."

Seals are not the only animals society defines as "cute" that are hunted when their numbers grow.

At the other end of the world in Australia a cull of a different kind has just finished. It dealt with a native animal deemed by some to be both a pest and competitor for introduced species.

It is also seen as so iconic for the land Down Under it has a proud place on the national coat of arms.

Just over 2,000 kangaroos were slaughtered in Canberra, the national capital, over May and June 2012 after numbers were deemed to be unsustainable.

Hunters licensed and tested by the Australian Federal Police shot the native marsupials out of hand.

The dead animals were buried where they fell.

Current estimates indicate that there may be between 35 to 50 million kangaroos in Australia.

Farmers and professional shooters are licensed to clear kangaroos from farming and grazing land across Australia where overstocking of the native animal is seen to compete for feed with introduced sheep and cattle.

Most recent culling figures show that in 2007 the national kangaroo-culling quota was more than 3.5 million (but significantly down on the figures earlier in the decade).

6 comments

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Tamara Sapach Fulmes · Ottawa, Ontario

Hypocrites! I think I am going to buy a seal coat.

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Kenneth Sorensen · Top Commenter

Me too. Who cares what the EU thinks.

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Gary Clarke · Top Commenter

You should have got one before now! They're beautiful, and Canadian.

[Reply](#) · [2](#) · [Like](#) · October 21 at 8:57pm



John Karperien · Top Commenter · SAIT

Unfortunately, the EU, has many supporters of this repressive policy that is entirely hypocritical and biased towards Canada. What I can't figure out is how does the EU think that this new stance makes any sense in reality? The UN, EU, NDP, Lieberals, Green Party, Elizabeth May, Greenpeace, Suzuki, enviroMENTALists, the CBC, Obama and on and on. None of these organisations and more like minded ones, no NOTHING about reality and how to operate and promote a successful economy that, when done the right way, not their way, can REDUCE debt and be a benefit to ALL economies of the world.

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