

NEWS: Around the Arctic September 24, 2012 - 2:48 pm

Canada calls for WTO action on seal ban dispute

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NUNATSIAQ NEWS

On Sept. 24 Canada, along with Norway, asked the World Trade Organization to appoint the panellists to hear their challenge to the EU's ban on seal products.

"Canada and Norway are ready with their legal case and look forward to moving ahead with the WTO dispute settlement process," said a Sept. 24 statement from Keith Ashfield, the federal minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Nunavut MP Leona Aglukkaq, who is also the federal minister for health, the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and the Arctic Council, and Peter Penashue, the federal minister of intergovernmental affairs.

The European Parliament, dismissing Canada's argument that the seal hunt is humane, voted by a margin of 550 to 49 to impose the seal ban in May 2009.

Since then, several rounds of trade consultations through the trade organization have failed to resolve the dispute.

Last year, Canada announced it wanted a dispute-settlement panel to challenge the ban, which came into force in 2010 among the 27 EU member nations.

Norway then joined Canada in asking the WTO to establish a dispute-settlement panel to consider hearing a challenge to the EU's seal products ban

"It is Canada's view that the EU's ban on imports of Canadian seal products violates the EU's WTO obligations," the ministers said.

The ministers said again Sept. 24 that the Atlantic and northern seal harvests are "humane, sustainable and well-regulated activities that provide an important source of food and income for coastal and Inuit communities."

"The Government of Canada is firmly committed to defending our sealing industry and the coastal and northern communities that depend on the seal harvest," the statement said.