

ANIMAL WELFARE CONCERNS WITH CANADA'S COMMERCIAL SEAL HUNT

The Canadian harp seal hunt is a competitive activity, carried out over an extensive area under very unpredictable conditions. Documented evidence in the form of video footage and veterinary reports confirm that Canada's commercial seal hunt is neither humane nor well regulated.

Video evidence obtained in recent years clearly shows live and conscious seal pups being impaled and dragged with steel hooks, seals being struck with illegal weapons, and seals clubbed or shot and left to suffer on the ice for extended periods of time. Although it is required under the Marine Mammal Regulations, few sealers are observed checking to confirm death prior to skinning an animal.

A number of recent veterinary reports on Canada's commercial seal hunt document the ongoing, unacceptable cruelty involved, and cite the need for improvement in humane killing practice, regulation, and enforcement.

A 2008 veterinary report by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) on the animal welfare aspects of seal hunting found that:

- effective killing does not always occur in practice
- during Canada's commercial seal hunt animals may suffer pain and distress.

- sealers often do not comply with the regulations
- claims made by the Canadian government that 98% of seals are killed humanely are "scientifically incorrect".

A 2005 veterinary panel organized by the World Wildlife Fund to look at Canada's commercial seal hunt noted that

- "the competitive nature of the hunt... creates an environment in which speed is the rule, and hunters may be encouraged to take shortcuts".

- "DFO [the Department of Fisheries and Oceans] appears to lack sufficient dedicated capacity to monitor and enforce regulation of the hunt, especially at the Front."

A 2001 veterinary study found that

- "... the present seal hunt fails to comply with basic animal welfare regulations."
- "There is undoubtedly an obvious need to reduce suffering and improve the welfare of these animals by alterations in the existing regulations and increasing their enforcement."
- "We conclude that the hunt is resulting in considerable and unacceptable suffering."

The continued inability - or unwillingness - of the Canadian authorities to enforce legislation, and of sealers to abide by it, has led many hunt observers to conclude that Canada's commercial seal hunt is inherently inhumane.



For more information:

- *Canada's Commercial Seal Hunt is Not "Acceptably Humane"*. (2005) http://www.ifaw.org/ifaw/dfiles/file_512.pdf
- *Observation of the Canadian Commercial Seal Hunt. Prince Edward Island, Canada.* (2001) http://www.ifaw.org/ifaw/dfiles/file_95.pdf
- *View seal hunt footage online* <http://www.stopthesealhunt.ca>