

CANADA'S COMMERCIAL SEAL HUNT AND INUIT

One of the claims made by sealing industry proponents, including the Canadian government, is that Canada's commercial seal hunt is important to Inuit culture.

But Canada's commercial seal hunt does not involve Inuit.

Canada's commercial seal hunt and Inuit sealing are two very different operations. They take place at different times of the year, in different places, involve different people, and different seals.

Inuit seal hunting very different from Canada's commercial harp seal hunt. Ringed seals (*Pusa hispida*) - not harp seals - are the primary target of Inuit hunters in northern Canada throughout the year.

Nunavut hunters kill an average of 719 harp seals each year. These are older animals, taken during the summer months. Canada's commercial seal hunt, meanwhile, takes some 300,000 harp seal pups, aged 3-weeks to 3-months, primarily during March and April.

Canada's commercial seal hunt is not a subsistence or full-utilization hunt. Most of the meat is left on the ice, and there are reports that 80% of the blubber is currently discarded.

The primary target of Canada's commercial seal hunt this hunt is the fur of young pups, which is sent overseas to be processed for use in the fashion industry.

Few people object to aboriginal subsistence hunting by aboriginal peoples. Virtually all existing or proposed trade bans on seal products have clear exemptions for Inuit-derived sealskins. The European ban on trade in seal products currently under discussion also targets large-scale, commercial hunts for seals, while exempting products derived from Inuit hunts in Arctic regions.

Deliberately confusing Inuit seal hunting with Canada's commercial seal hunt is a cynical attempt to capitalize on concern for the preservation of aboriginal cultures and traditions.

IFAW is not opposed to the subsistence hunting of wild animals, including seals, by aboriginal peoples, provided that such hunting is biologically sustainable and that reasonable care is taken to minimize pain and suffering.

