



Media Release

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New killing methods in Canada cull won't stop cruelty say seal campaigners

The Canadian Government has proposed new regulations governing the country's annual mass cull of around 350,000 seals which begins again this March. The new regulations have been introduced in an attempt to make the hunt appear more humane, with the threat of a European Community ban on all seal products an increasing possibility this year.

One measure proposes to ban the use of the spiked club, or 'hakapik', to kill seals over a year old unless they have been shot first. However, with less than one percent of seals killed more than a year old, this restriction will make little difference. The use of the hakapik has led to persistent allegations that many seal pups may still be conscious after clubbing and are consequently skinned alive.

Around 90% of seals killed are shot, many in the water and these animals have to be gaffed and hauled aboard the sealing boats causing untold suffering. Under the new proposals the sealers will have to ensure the skull is broken and the animals are bled for a full minute before they can begin skinning the animals.

However, the Seal Protection Action Group (SPAG) does not believe that the proposed minor changes to killing methods will do anything to change the public's perceptions of the Canadian seal hunt, or the organisation's determination to stop it:

"Tweaking the regulations on killing methods will do nothing to diminish public anger and revulsion at this brutal and cruel hunt" said Andy Ottaway, Campaign Director of SPAG, ***"Hundreds of thousands of seal pups will still be shot, gaffed and clubbed, with many animals still skinned alive. That is totally unacceptable in a civilized and compassionate world"***.

The Canadian seal hunt is the largest slaughter of marine mammals in the world with an average of between 270,000-335,000 seals annually. The seals are killed primarily for their fur, but other products such as seal oil is sold increasingly as a 'health supplement'. However, SPAG believes that the high levels of industrial contaminants such as PCB's and mercury, which build up in the blubber of marine mammals such as whales and seals, poses a serious risk to human health.

The Seal Protection Action Group has been campaigning for a comprehensive EU import ban on all seal products. Unfortunately, although a ban is increasingly likely this year, there is increasing concern that under current proposals seal imports will still be permitted from hunts that meet certain criteria for humane killing. However, monitoring and enforcing animal welfare provisions would be extremely difficult if not impossible in the working conditions of the hunts.

"The Canadian seal hunt remains a cruel, environmental atrocity" said Andy Ottaway ***"and nothing the Canadian Government can do will alter that fact, other than ending it once and for all. The damage it does to Canada's image and reputation is incalculable"***

Although the UK Government is supporting an EU ban on all seal product imports, SPAG is concerned over the woefully inadequate protection afforded to the UK's globally important populations of common and grey seals. An estimated 5,000 seals are shot in Scottish waters alone each year by the Scottish salmon industry with scientists recently reporting a 'frightening' decline in common seals around the British Isles.

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For interviews, further information or photographs, please contact Andy Ottaway of the Seal Protection Action Group on 01273 471403 or mobile 07855 666069.

Notes to Editors

- The Seal Protection Action Group (SPAG) registered charity (SC017447) is dedicated to the protection of seals and their environment worldwide www.sealaction.org
- SPAG is a founder-member of the Seal Protection Groups coalition: www.protectourseals.org.uk
- In September 2006, the European Parliament called on the European Commission to ban trade in seal products. A record number, 425 of 732 MEPs, supported a Written Declaration to this issue.
- Several EU Member States, including Belgium and the Netherlands, have implemented unilateral bans on the import of seal products until such time as an EU-wide ban is in place. The UK supports a ban but will not act unilaterally.
- A new UK based opinion poll shows that 79% of respondents agree that the European Union should ban the import and trade in seal products.
- In response to a public outcry the EU introduced a ban on the import of fur from baby seals in 1983. Since then more than 4 million seal pups have been slaughtered in Canada alone.

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Scottish Reg. Charity No: SC017447

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