

Canadian seal slaughter resumes



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The hunt continues despite evidence that it is cruel, uneconomic and unnecessary.

Despite international condemnation, the commercial hunt for harp and hooded seal pups began in full force across the ice floes of eastern Canada at the end of March. As many as 350,000 harp seal pups will be slaughtered over the next few weeks – the highest quota for harp seals in history.

IFAW representatives are documenting this year's hunt, both from the air and on the ice itself. To date, IFAW has submitted video evidence of more than 660 probable violations of Canada's Marine Mammal Regulations to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. These abuses include skinning or bleeding live seals, stockpiling dead and dying animals, dragging live seals across the ice with sharpened steel hooks and shooting seals and leaving them to suffer. Not a single charge has been laid in response.

Politicians have offered grossly inflated estimates of the annual value of this hunt – suggesting figures as high as \$20 million – while proving completely unable to substantiate these numbers. In reality, the hunt accounts for a fraction of one percent of Newfoundland's Gross Domestic Product. This industry operates for a few weeks a year, and really employs only a few hundred people on a part-time basis during that period. In addition, the industry is heavily subsidised. Between 1995 and 2001, an average of close to \$3 million per year was granted in government subsidies to the sealing sector - to support an industry that, according to the most optimistic of government estimates, brought in only \$6 million dollars in landed value to the sealers in 2000.

Despite claims that the seal cull will help protect fish stocks, the truth is that there is no scientific evidence that a reduced seal population would benefit commercial fisheries in any way.

Marine ecosystems are incredibly complex, and we cannot assume that by removing one species another will necessarily benefit. In fact, in the case of seals, removing seals might well have a negative effect on the recovery of Atlantic cod stocks since seals also eat predators of cod, such as squid. In this situation, a reduction in harp seals could lead to an increase in squid numbers, resulting in even greater predation on cod. Many scientists now believe that reducing the harp seal population might actually harm commercial fisheries.

IFAW continues to bear witness to the hunt and to campaign for an end to this needless cruelty.

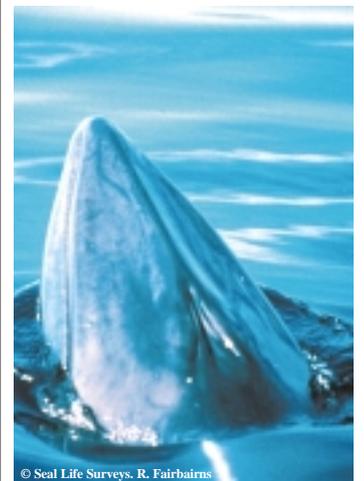
IFAW in Iceland

In March, IFAW campaigners toured Icelandic high schools, talking to students about the whaling programme in Iceland. In 2003, Iceland killed 36 Minke whales and they had planned to kill more Minke, Fin and Sei whales in subsequent years. There has not yet been a definitive announcement on Iceland's whaling plan for 2004.

In all, 18 schools were visited, constituting two-thirds of Icelandic high schools. The tour included visits to the capital Reykjavik and smaller towns in the north and eastern Iceland including Akureyri and Neskaupstadur. The students were 16 to 20 year olds and were mainly biology students.

IFAW was extremely well received and we were able to discuss our view that whaling is cruel, unnecessary, and that it has been devastating to endangered populations of whales in the past. We received coverage in Morgunbladid (a national Icelandic newspaper) outlining the reasons for our visits to the high schools.

Each student will be entered into a competition to go on a whale watching trip in Iceland, courtesy of the Icelandic whale watching association and one student will win a day on Song of the Whale whilst it is in Iceland to find out about alternative research techniques that do not harm whales.



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Europe “waters down” plans to prevent bycatch

The EU has missed a crucial chance to protect dolphins and porpoises from dying in fishing nets by weakening proposals in a vote on the 23rd March after eight hours of negotiations.

Bycatch in fisheries presents the most acute threat to the survival of dolphins and harbour porpoises, with populations such as the Baltic harbour porpoise now heading for extinction. On average it has been estimated that 27 harbour porpoises are killed in EU fishing nets every day, along with high numbers of dolphins.

The original Commission proposal offered a first step towards reducing the killing of legally protected, non-target species in EU fisheries and reflected

requirements set out in the EU Habitats Directive over 10 years ago.

The key points of the original Commission proposal were the phasing out of driftnets in the Baltic Sea by 2007 with an immediate restriction in length to 2.5km, the compulsory use of pingers (acoustic deterrent devices attached to nets) in certain fisheries for all vessels, observers on board a proportion of vessels to monitor bycatch, and the mandatory reporting of bycatch elsewhere.

In the new adopted Regulation vessels under 12 metres will not be subject to the use of pingers and there will be no bycatch observers on boats below 15 metres. However, evidence shows that the effectiveness of

pingers is strictly related to the presence of observers. In addition, vessels under 15 metres represent a large block of fishing activities and it is known that they do cause bycatch in coastal waters – where harbour porpoises are often found.

Whilst IFAW welcomes the ban on driftnets in the Baltic Sea, we are disappointed that the new Regulation delays the ban by one year to 1 January 2008 and replaces the expected limitation in net length with a progressive reduction in fishing effort. IFAW believes that the UK Government should implement the bycatch regulation in full whilst appreciating that pingers are only a short-term solution and that long-term mitigation measures need to be researched and developed.



IFAW released new legal documents supporting the Hunting Bill as compatible with ECHR and outlining the simple stages that the Bill needs to complete to become law in 2004.

We are calling for the Hunting Bill to be reintroduced as soon as possible, so that the application of the Parliament Acts can ensure that a ban on hunting with dogs will be on the

IFAW says it's “Time for the Ban”

statute book by the end of this parliamentary session.

Please contact us if you would like a copy of these documents, or simply log on to www.ifaw.org

Ivory sale decision delayed



During March 2004, governments agreed to delay a decision about the proposed sales of ivory stockpiles from three southern African countries. The deliberations of the Standing Committee of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) suggest that there is still a lot of work to be done before Botswana, Namibia and South Africa will be allowed to sell their ivory.

Compounded by the lack of domestic legislative, regulatory and enforcement control in both Asian and African countries, IFAW believe that any form of legal trade provides cover for the trafficking of illegal ivory from threatened populations of wild elephants.

Earlier in March, the governments of Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Tunisia and Uganda unanimously agreed that the conditions set down by CITES must be met before the sale is allowed to proceed. IFAW commends the Standing Committee's recommendations with respect to tightening up control of domestic ivory markets and the determination of detrimental impact resulting from trade or decisions around trade. However, IFAW believe that any trade in ivory will lead to elephant populations becoming even more threatened than they are today.

The proposed sales can be agreed through a postal vote of CITES members at any time, although it is likely that no decision will be made before the next Conference of the Parties in October 2004.

“Elephants on the High Street”, a report published by IFAW in March, exposes the extent of illegal ivory trade in the UK and the difficulties of controlling the trade even with the relatively high capacity for law enforcement in this country. Please contact us to request a copy.

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