

Top Issues: Save the Seals Lobby Day 2010

There are so many ways you can help save the seals today. We are asking you to contact your Member of Parliament and your Senators to ask for some key things.

The most effective way to convey your request is in person. Every Canadian has the right to request a personal meeting with their MP or Senators. If you aren't able to meet with your representatives in person, a telephone call or handwritten letter (sent by mail or fax) is also quite effective. And a final way to convey your message is through email.

When you contact your Member of Parliament and/or Senators on Lobby Day, there are five key requests you might want to make:

1. Your MP and Senators should call on Fisheries Minister Gail Shea to immediately cancel the 2010 commercial seal hunt.

- Harp seals, which are the primary target of Canada's commercial seal hunt, are ice dependent. They need sea ice cover to give birth to and nurse their pups.
- Environment Canada confirms 2010 has seen the lowest sea ice formation on record off Canada's east coast—the areas where harp seals give birth.
- This low ice cover is part of a larger trend. 21 of the past 40 years have had ice cover below the average for that period. The past 15 years have all had below average ice cover.
- Mass seal pup mortalities are expected in 2010. Many mothers who cannot find sea ice will be forced to abort in the water, and many pups will be born on fragile, thin ice that may break up before the pups are strong enough to survive in open water.
- A responsible government would take action to save the seal pups that do survive by cancelling the 2010 commercial seal hunt.

2. Your Senators should support Senator Mac Harb's historic bill to end the commercial seal hunt.

- Senators are supposed to represent Canadians, not industry lobby groups. And polling consistently shows the overwhelming majority of Canadians want the commercial seal hunt to end.
- Veterinarians say Canada's commercial seal hunt is inherently inhumane and should be prohibited. If the seal hunt cannot be made humane, it must be ended.
- Conservation biologists say commercial sealing poses a threat to the survival of harp seals, particularly in light of the impacts of climate change on these ice dependent animals.

- Given the negative impacts of the ongoing boycotts of Canadian seafood and tourism (that will continue until the seal hunt ends), and the massive subsidies necessary to prop up the sealing industry, the seal hunt is costing Canadians far more than it brings in.
- The seal hunt is seriously damaging our international reputation. Canada's threats of WTO challenge in response to nations prohibiting their trade in seal products are damaging our most important trade relationships.

3. Your MP and Senators should work in the longer term to end the commercial seal slaughter by promoting a fair buyout of the commercial sealing industry.

- A federal buyout of the commercial sealing industry would be a graceful way for Canada to end the seal hunt and exit a controversy which has haunted it for half a century.
- A sealing industry buyout would involve the federal government compensating fishermen for lost income as the seal hunt is ended, while investing funds in other economic opportunities.
- The money needed for a generous buyout of the sealing industry would be less than two percent of the funds already invested by the federal government in fisheries buyouts and diversification plans on Canada's east coast in recent years.
- Sealers support a federal sealing industry buyout. A 2010 Ipsos Reid survey found that **fully half of sealers holding an opinion supported a federal buyout of the sealing industry.**
- Ending the commercial seal hunt makes clear economic sense. Global markets for seal products are closing. The United States, the European Union, Mexico and Croatia have all prohibited their trade in seal products, and a number of other countries are now following suit. Meanwhile, a boycott of Canadian seafood products, which will continue to expand until the seal hunt has been ended for good, has already attracted the support of more than 5500 establishments and 650,000 individuals.
- Economists say that a sealing industry buyout would cost Canada far less than the annual subsidies that must be invested to prop up the sealing industry and the loss of revenue associated with seal hunt related boycotts of Canadian products.

4. Your MP and Senators should work to stop a Canadian WTO challenge against the European Union in retaliation for its prohibition on seal product trade.

- In 2009, the European Union responded to European opinion by prohibiting its trade in seal products. Canadian government representatives immediately threatened a WTO challenge in response.
- If the Canadian government launches a WTO challenge, it will be acting in direct opposition to the views of Canadians, 86 percent of whom supported the right of the EU to ban seal product trade (Environics 2008).

- A WTO challenge would seriously damage our relationship with our second largest trading partner at a crucial time. Right now, Canada and the EU are negotiating a free trade deal that would benefit Canada's economy to the tune of \$12 billion annually. One can only wonder what kind of reception this free trade deal will have in Europe, in the face of this attack on the EU values.
- Should Canada launch a WTO challenge and win, a precedent would be set that could prevent Canada from prohibiting products it finds morally unacceptable. One only needs to look at the recent refusal of the Canadian government to prohibit trade in cat and dog fur (because of the perception that doing so would weaken the case against the EU seal product trade ban) to see the damage this kind of trade retaliation can cause.

5. Your MP and Senators should work to remove federal subsidies to the sealing industry.

- The overwhelming majority of Canadians want the commercial seal hunt to end and oppose the Canadian government's use of tax dollars to promote the sealing industry.
- The commercial seal hunt receives many forms of subsidies from the Canadian government. The Canadian Institute for Business and the Environment reports that the government provided more than \$20 million in subsidies to the sealing industry between 1995 and 2001. In 2004, more than \$400,000 was provided by the Canadian government to companies for the development of seal products, and the subsidies continue. From overseas product marketing trips—such as Fisheries Minister Gail Shea's recent seal product marketing trip to China, to the estimated \$3.6 million spent by the Canadian government on a failed attempt at regulatory enforcement in 2009, to ice breaking operations performed by the Coast Guard, to the estimated cost of WTO negotiations (\$10 million) surrounding the EU prohibition on seal product trade, to the funds spent by the Canadian government to lobby foreign nations not to prohibit seal product trade, to the money invested by the Canadian government in countering the ProtectSeals Canadian seafood boycott, to the small fortune spent by the Canadian embassies defending the commercial seal hunt, there is an enormous amount of public money and resources invested in continuing the commercial seal hunt.
- In this time of economic uncertainty, there are many places these millions of dollars could be better invested.
- The subsidies currently invested in artificially propping up the commercial sealing industry in the wake of closing markets and changing ice conditions should be redirected to developing safer, more sustainable economic alternatives for fishermen.