

Please consider this truthful perspective from an Indigenous woman in Canada. The blog post can be found here: <https://jenshears.com/f/the-seal-hunt>

The Seal Hunt: A Perfect Storm of Optics, Emotion and Irony

April 8, 2023 | Hunting, Lifestyle, Newfoundland, Seal Hunting



It's early April - the time of year when ice floes reappear off the coast of Newfoundland, and sealers, just as they have done for centuries, head out to them to undertake the harp seal hunt. With the launch of the hunt, so begins the annual anti seal hunt **circus**. You'll likely see click-bait pieces all over social media, and uninformed (or paid-off) celebrities championing the cause they know so little about. Money thirsty animal rights groups double down on their campaigns to "ban" the seal hunt this time of year. I say "ban" in quotations because that's likely the very last thing they want to see happen. If it were ever banned these groups would lose their ability to leverage this cash cow.

In this candid 1978 interview, Paul Watson (formerly of Greenpeace, and more recent founder of the Sea Shepherd Society) admits:

- The seal hunt is easy to raise money on
- The profits from anti seal hunt campaigns fund other animal rights campaigns
- Seals are easy to exploit as an image despite not being endangered; and
- In true colonialist form, Californians from the highest standard of living travelled to the poorest areas to tell locals not to hunt abundant seals, despite ignoring three species of endangered dolphins in their own neck of the woods.

The seal hunt is without a doubt the most regulated and coddled hunt/industry in the world, and the number of layered nuances, ironies, misconceptions and straight up lies being told about it is nauseating. In this post I'll tackle these misconceptions and hopefully set the record straight. If you see anyone spreading lies about the seal hunt, be sure to clear up their confusion.

Misconceptions

1. Activists claim that seals are endangered

One of the biggest misconceptions about seals is that their populations is critically low or endangered. That couldn't be farther from the truth. If anything, seals are so abundant that they're in danger of falling victim to nature's natural population reduction mechanisms - starvation and disease, which are cruel and unnecessary. The current estimate of the harp seal population off the coast of Newfoundland is 7.4 MILLION, which is by far the highest in recorded history (<https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/species-especes/profiles-profil/harpseal-phoquegroenland-eng.html> , <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fmars.2020.569258/full>).

Seals are so abundant that they're entering into rivers to eat salmon, they are diving to the ocean floor for food, and impacting other species as their traditional foods aren't plentiful enough to sustain their booming population. They are having dire impacts on other ocean species, and their current biomass exceeds that of lower trophic levels, which is opposite of a healthy ecosystem (<https://parlvu.parl.gc.ca/Harmony/en/PowerBrowser/PowerBrowserV2/20230330/-1/38851?gefdesc=&startposition=20230330153137> at 16:45:05).

The following video demonstrates the stomach contents of a harvested seal. It's easy to see how over 7 million of them could be disastrous for the commercial, intrinsic, and ecological value of other marine creatures.



The total allowable catch/quota for harp seals (the quantity of seals that scientists have determined should be hunted to ensure the population is sustainable) is 400,000 (FOUR HUNDRED THOUSAND) **annually**. Since animal rights activists have lied about the hunt and persuaded countries to ban seal products, the market price for seal pelts, meat and oil is so low that it isn't feasible for many sealers to hunt. Out of the 400,000 seals that should be taken every year, only ~25,000-35,000 have been taken annually over the past 5 years. Seals are nowhere near endangered, and something drastic needs to happen to reduce their population - for their own sake and for that of the rest of the ecosystem.



2. Activists claim the seal hunt kills whitecoat "baby" seals

The whitecoat (baby seal) hunt was banned in 1987. Seals that are hunted are young, but they are fully independent and weaned. They have moulted their white fur and are grey with black spots. Animal rights groups still use the whitecoat image though because, as Paul Watson himself said in the interview above, they are cute and as such, are easy to exploit and capitalize on. As he explained, whitecoats always look like they're crying, but it's just due to the fact that they constantly produce salty "tears" to prevent their eyes from freezing. Seal fur products are not white, because the seals that are hunted are not



3. Activists claim that the seal hunt is inhumane

This is such a loaded one! It gets my head spinning, to be honest. First of all, full stop, the seal hunt has been determined through studies in *reputable* peer-reviewed journals to be equally, if not more humane than any other hunt or slaughter (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC339547>). Unfortunately though, the procedures that make the seal hunt humane actually **appear** brutal and barbaric, and provide ammunition for animal rights cults to siphon more money from their well-meaning donors.

For many years, activists claimed that harvesters skinned seals and took the meat while the animals were still alive. This narrative was so prevalent that the sealing industry wanted to ensure it could prove otherwise. This resulted in the implementation of regulations, procedures and training on how to properly harvest a seal.

In order to get a seal licence, harvesters must first take a day-long training course on humane harvesting for seals. I have hunted around the world and I have never had to take a government regulated animal-specific course before being able to get a tag. This shows the amount of time, money and effort that harvesters and government are willing to invest to ensure the hunt is done ethically and humanely. The humane harvesting course was developed by veterinarians and scientists, and outlines the 3 steps that are **mandatory** when hunting a seal (<https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fisheries-peches/seals-phoques/humane-sans-cruaute-eng.html>). They are:

Step 1: The shot

Seals are shot using relatively high powered firearms and ammunition (minimum velocity of 1,800 ft/s and energy of 1,100 ft/lb), with the animal's head as the target.

Step 2: Palpate the skull (this is where things start to really go downhill from an optics perspective)

After the shot, sealers must walk up to the seal and feel the skull. If both sides of the skull are crushed, sealers can proceed to Step 3. If either side of the skull isn't crushed though, sealers must use a very specific and highly regulated tool to hit the seal on the head in order to ensure both sides of the skull is crushed. This ensures the seal is irreversibly unconscious or dead.

I often hear seal hunt defenders say "we don't club seals anymore". It's true in the sense that the seals we hunt now are independent and you can't just easily walk up to them and initially hit them on the head as we did for years with less mobile whitecoats, but hitting seals on the head is a **prescribed part of ensuring the hunt is humane**.

Interesting note: Even if the initial shot results in complete obliteration of the head, sealers must reach down and show they're touching the head/palpating the skull. Enforcement officers routinely conduct aerial patrols of the seal hunt, and if they catch sealers not making the motion of palpating the skull they will issue charges.

The vast majority of seal hunt images that cause people to gasp are those of the "barbaric" hunter standing over the seal wielding the "club". How ironic is it that this step is **mandatory in the interest of being humane**? The public relations mess continues though with Step 3...



This seal is likely dead from the the initial shot from a firearm, but if both sides of the skull are not fully crushed, the harvester is required by law to hit it on the head with a very specific tool. This further ensures that the seal is unconscious/dead before fur, meat and fat removal occurs. Photo source: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2008-04/01/content_6582268.htm

Step 3: Bleeding Out

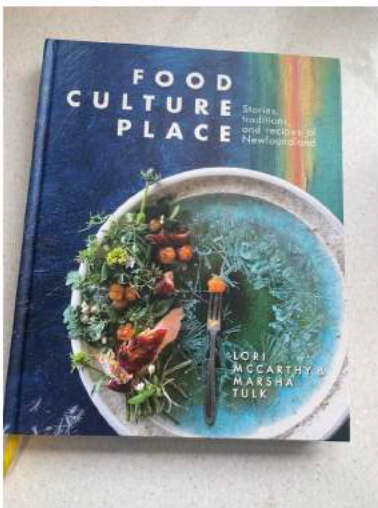
Once seal harvesters confirm that the skull is no longer intact, they must bleed the animal by cutting the two axillary arteries located beneath the front flippers, and must allow a minimum of one minute to pass before processing the animal. Bleeding ensures the seal is dead. A huge component of the perceived brutality of the seal hunt is the stark contrast of red blood on white ice. Imagine laying white carpet under a moose or deer kill site. Imagine laying a white carpet under an area where a hundred of them have bled out. Again, images of a procedure that seal harvesters are required to undertake to ensure a humane harvest is the very fodder that animal rights group use against us out of context and without explanation.



After a seal is shot with a firearm, the harvester must ensure the skull is fully crushed before severing the arteries under the flippers and letting the animal bleed out. This leaves a large pool of stark red blood on white ice, and provides ammunition for animal rights groups. The steps required to ensure the hunt is humane are the things that appear to be barbaric to the uninformed. This is the biggest optics conundrum that I've ever heard of. Photo source: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/canada/7575251/Canadas-annual-seal-hunt-draws-sealers-and-sceptics.html>

These three steps, and the scientific literature associated with them confirm that the seal hunt isn't the inhumane, barbaric slaughter portrayed by animal rights cults. Unfortunately these wealthy businesses have far more reach and advertising ability than the primary producer, which is often the case. Primary producers are typically the hardest workers but get paid the least.

4: Activists claim that seals are only killed for their fur



Food Culture Place by Lori McCarthy and Marsha Tulk is a treasure of stories and recipes dedicated to Newfoundland, and the island's connection to its culture and food

While fur was historically the main focus of the seal hunt, generations of Newfoundlanders were raised on seal meat. Seal meat is very dark and nutrient rich, and the taste varies based on the cut. I find that the flippers can have more of a fishy taste than the loins. Seal flipper pie is a traditional food in Newfoundland, but more recently chefs from all over are finding creative ways to prepare and present seal dishes.

Every Spring, Taylor's Fish Market brings their truck to downtown St. John's to sell fresh seal flippers as they have done for many years.

Publications such as *Food, Culture, Place* by Lori McCarthy and Marsha Tulk have dedicated a portion of their book to seal stories and recipes.



I cooked a feed of seal flippers, based on Lori McCarthy's mom's recipe. This photo and recipe are in "Food Culture Place".

Chefs say food hypocrisy has no place at their tables



Jane Adey · CBC News · Posted: Mar 30, 2019 10:24 AM NDT | Last Updated: March 30, 2019



Chef Jean-Philippe Bourassa-Caron serves seal meat for brunch during Seal Fest in Quebec City at Chez Boulay restaurant. Bourassa-Caron's dish: seal terrine on mushroom purée topped with a bordelaise sauce and poached eggs. (Jane Adey/CBC)

Photo source: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/sealfest-quebec-culinary-festival-1.5076634>

St. John's chefs push benefits of seal meat



CBC News · Posted: Dec 08, 2014 2:10 PM NST | Last Updated: December 8, 2014



Chefs Todd Perrin and Jeremy Charles show visitors around as they prepare ingredients for a dinner at a restaurant in St. John's. (CBC)

Photo Source: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/st-john-s-chefs-push-benefits-of-seal-meat-1.2863700>

Newfoundland chefs Todd Perrin (Mallard Cottage) and Jeremy Charles (Merchant Tavern) have done incredible work to promote wild game, but the effort they have shown to tout seal meat in particular is noteworthy. The seal events they've hosted, and the seal dishes they've prepared have received rave reviews.

Seal oil capsules are also very popular and healthy. Seal oil contains

a different and more powerful Omega-3 than what's found in fish and plants. It's called DPA, and is 10x more effective than the others.

The loss of seal markets not only means bans on seal fur, but it carries over to seal meat and seal oil. Animal rights groups like to put down the hunt by claiming it's wasteful and is only a fur hunt (which is arguably fine given that it's a free range hunt, fur is a warm and biodegradable material, and other trophic levels completely consume what is left behind), but they fail to mention that any headway we were making on seal meat and oil markets were eliminated with the bans they lobbied for. It's beyond frustrating.



Seal oil capsules are a very healthy source of Omega-3. Photo source: Carino

Many seal bans contravene International Conventions (Convention on Biodiversity, Convention on Migratory Species, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, etc.) to which countries are signatories, so there should be challenges on this front. One of the three pillars of the Convention on Biodiversity is the sustainable use of living resources for the maximum benefit of people. Canada, the EU and the United States are all signatories, so a ban on seal products doesn't make sense.

While not directly a result of modern animal rights tactics, seal products aren't permitted in the United States due to the Marine Mammal Protection Act - a piece of legislation that is well intentioned, but grossly misapplied to overpopulated harp seals. There could be incredible demand for seal fur, meat, and oil products with absolutely no concern for the health and sustainability of the seal population. I hope to see the day when we can fill American and European orders for seal products instead of sending an apologetic note along with a refund.

The seal hunt is a tough topic because the general public is being fed an extremely emotional and out-of-context narrative by big businesses with a major interest in pulling at people's wallets via their heartstrings. It's hard to get facts past that when people already have their minds made up (albeit based on lies). Nobody has more at stake for the health of wildlife populations than those of us who rely on wildlife for our food, clothing, spirit, health, shelter, etc. I wish people would ask those of us on the rural land and sea more often, instead of blindly following largely urban based celebrities and entities.

I hope this information helps you gain a better understanding of the seal hunt and its realities and requirements. I also hope it will help you see through the lies out there, and maybe even equip you to educate others. For anyone heading out to the dangerous floes in search of seals, I wish you abundant harvests and a safe return home. Get 'er done!

Jen :)



Jen with a seal pelt, a bag of seal flippers, and wearing a hat and boots made of seal fur from her store, Natural Boutique

Added note: If you're interested in more viewpoints and stories, here are some great pieces to watch/listen to:

"My Ancestors were Rogues and Murderers" by Anne Troake: I HIGHLY recommend this documentary by Anne Troake. Anne comes from a Newfoundland sealing family, and she documents their experiences over the years. It's a beautifully produced film, which will have you laughing, crying, and boiling in anger over how deceitful animal rights groups can be. Here is the link: [My Ancestors were Rogues and](#)

Murders

Angry Inuk by Alethea Arnaquq-Baril: "Seal hunting, a critical part of Inuit life, has been controversial for a long time. Now, a new generation of Inuit, armed with social media and their own sense of humour and justice, are challenging the anti-sealing groups and bringing their own voices into the conversation.": [Angry Inuk](#)

Canadian Sealing - A Labyrinth of Lies: This is a great 6-minute presentation by Jim Winter, a well-spoken advocate of sealing as a means to conservation and rural areas/economies: [Canadian Sealing - A Labyrinth of Lies](#)

"The Debaters: Seal Hunt": While the lack of an adequate seal hunt is a very serious issue that is threatening the marine ecosystem and rural harvesters, there is a **hilarious** episode of CBC's "The Debaters", where Newfoundland comedy stars Mark Critch and Jonny Harris tackle the topic. I definitely recommend listening to this preview and downloading the full episode. [The Debaters: Seal Hunt](#)

I've also spoken at length about this topic on several recent podcasts. Most recently, the [Panoramic Outdoors podcast](#), and the [Wild Fed podcast with Daniel Vitalis](#).



Seal hunting is a very dangerous activity. I wish all sealers a successful harvest and a safe return home. Photo source:

<https://womeninthearticandantarctic.ca/2022/05/31/interview-reflecting-on-the-seal-hunt-and-the-anti-sealing-movement-a-conversation-with-former-president-of-the-canadian-sealers-association-james-winter/>