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# The EU's role in legitimising the stigmatisation of sealing and sealers

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## ABSTRACT

Seal hunting is a polarising topic, and the European Union's 2009 ban is arguably the most high-profile and impactful statement against the practice of seal hunting on the world stage. At the same time, the stories and experiences of sealers, their families and their communities experiencing cultural and economic violence, psychological abuse and forced assimilation were, and continue to be, overshadowed by the narratives and content generated globally by anti-sealing activists. This paper addresses the question: In what way is the EU seal product import ban contributing to the stigmatisation of sealing and sealers? It argues that the 2009 ban legitimised the widespread stigmatisation of sealers and seal products generated and advocated by anti-sealing activists. In adopting activist agendas and explicitly targeting sealing as morally objectionable, the EU gave power and cover to activists' attitudes, actions and beliefs with marginal open-minded investigation into the harm committed by these actors. In effect this sanctions the cultural and economic violence inflicted on sealers, their families and communities.

## KEYWORDS


Anti-sealing movement; cultural violence; European economic community; European Union; International Fund for Animal Welfare; stigma

## Introduction

Seal hunting is a polarising topic. After decades of anti-sealing activism, seal hunting and sealers are heavily stigmatised in Western society.<sup>1</sup> The impact of the activism has caused widespread detrimental consequences for many traditional fishing/sealing communities across the Canadian North and in the Nordic and Baltic Sea areas, notably in Kalaallit Nunaat,<sup>2</sup> Norway, Sweden and Finland.<sup>3</sup>

Through years of non-stop creative direct action stunts captured and edited for media consumption and campaigning material; celebrity endorsements; and lobbying of politicians in Canada, the United States and Europe, activists such as the International Fund

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<sup>1</sup>Patey, *A Battle Lost*; Allen, "Anti-Sealing as an Industry"; Harter, "Environmental Justice for Whom?"; and Burke, "The Case for a Greenpeace Apology."

<sup>2</sup>Kalaallit Nunaat is the Kalaallisut name for Greenland.

<sup>3</sup>Burke, *Cultural Violence, Stigma and the Legacy of the Anti-Sealing Movement*; Graugaard, *Tracing Seal – Unsettling Narratives of Kalaallit Seal Relations*; Suuronen et al., "Reassessing the Management Criteria of Growing Seal Populations"; and Svells et al., "Struggling Towards Co-existence of the Baltic Sea Coastal Fisheries and the Grey Seal."

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for Animal Welfare (IFAW), Greenpeace (until 1985), Sea Shepherd Conservation Society and the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals influenced many urban-based North American and Western European audiences.<sup>4</sup> These audiences are largely convinced that sealers are savage murderers, and seal hunting is a slaughter of innocent babies.<sup>5</sup>

The European Union (EU), as this paper will demonstrate, bears a large responsibility for legitimising the attitudes, behaviours and beliefs of anti-sealing activists to the detriment of traditional rural and coastal fishers/sealers, their families and communities. The EU predecessor, the European Economic Community (EEC), was strongly influenced by the environmental and animal rights campaigning against seal hunting, resulting in a ban on harp and hooded seal pup fur in 1983.<sup>6</sup> However, it is the subsequent 2009 ban on all seal product imports on the basis of a moral objection<sup>7</sup> that has had the biggest role in cementing the stigmatisation of sealing and sealers.

In 2009, the EU banned seal product imports and the placing of seal products in the EU marketplace through the ‘Trade in Seal Products Basic Regulation’<sup>8</sup>; a regulation that was amended in 2015 to reflect the outcome of a World Trade Organization ruling. It has two exceptions: (1) seal products resulting from Indigenous subsistence hunting practices and (2) goods brought in by individuals exclusively for personal use by themselves or their families. The 2009 ban frames sealing as a ‘moral concern’, though it is at pains to stress Indigenous seal hunting as morally acceptable, provided that it is conducted within the EU’s externally imposed understanding of traditional hunting.<sup>9</sup>

This paper addresses the question: In what way is the EU seal product import ban contributing to the stigmatisation of sealing and sealers? It argues that by explicitly targeting sealers as morally objectionable, the EU gave power and cover to activists’ attitudes, actions and beliefs with marginal investigation into the harms committed by these actors, in effect providing *de facto* sanctioning of the cultural and economic violence inflicted on sealers, their families and communities. Furthermore, the conditions of the ban make local circumstances problematic within EU member-states that traditionally hunt seals.

## Methods and data

This paper uses a qualitative research approach. It is part of the project *Seals, Stigma and Survival: Finding Solutions to the EU Stigmatization of Seal Hunting*, funded by the Nordic Council in Greenland’s Nordic Arctic Programme and Innovation South Greenland. The archival research comes from the Center for Newfoundland Studies (CNS) at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador’s Queen Elizabeth 2 Library in St. John’s, Canada and the Wilfrid Laurier University’s Laurier Archives and

<sup>4</sup>Patey, *A Battle Lost*; Burke, *Cultural Violence, Stigma and the Legacy of the Anti-Sealing Movement*; and Davies, *Savage Luxury*.

<sup>5</sup>Commission of the European Communities, “Impact Assessment on the Potential Impact of a Ban of Products Derived from Seal Species”; See European Commission. “Feedback and Statistics,” Feedback F3482051; Feedback F3470732; Feedback F3472109; Feedback F3477513.

<sup>6</sup>European Commission, “About this Initiative.”

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>EU, “Regulation (EU) 2015/1775 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 6 October 2015 Amending Regulation (EC) No 1007/2009 on Trade in Seal Products and Repealing Commission Regulation (EU) No 737/2010.”

Special Collections in Waterloo, Canada. This archival research was previously supported by a J.R. Smallwood Foundation Fellowship awarded to Dr Burke in 2020–2021 and the Joan Mitchell Travel Award awarded to Dr Burke in 2023 (deferred due to unforeseen circumstances until 2025).

Contemporary data from the 2024 EU public consultation feedback on the ‘Trade in seal products – fitness check of EU rules’ is used to help illustrate the enduring stigmatisation of sealing and sealers. Of the fitness check process, the European Commission states: ‘This initiative will assess if the rules in place remain fit for purpose, focusing on their socio-economic impact and their impact on seal populations’.<sup>10</sup> The fitness check included a call for evidence from the public between 15 May and 7 August 2024.<sup>11</sup>

Of the contributors to the global public consultation process, the majority list France as their country of origin, a country well-known for anti-sealing activism support: 82.74% according to the consultation webpage.<sup>12</sup> In some instances, the names of feedback contributors are included. These alleged names are included in references to comments the paper made, but it should be noted that they are unverifiable. The EU website also provides automatic English language translations of comments submitted in other languages. These translations are used in this paper, but it should be acknowledged that the EU website states that the ‘[a]utomatic translations may not be 100% accurate’.<sup>13</sup>

There are 14,146 total instances of feedback submitted to the public consultation process, of which 13,749 are categorised as ‘unique feedback’ and 13,679 instances (or 96.70%) are contributed by EU citizens.<sup>14</sup> The comments were reviewed primarily through the use of keyword searches based on the research subject matter and geographic focus on Arctic/sub-Arctic states; search terms used to get a general sense of expressed views on the EU ban include – IFAW, Greenland, Denmark, Inuit, Canada, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Indigenous, Faroe Islands and stigma. The comments featured in the paper stood out in our review as representative of both sides of the pro- and anti-sealing debate and are used to illustrate the tonal differences and subject matter focuses coming from either side.

It must be noted that technical issues were encountered with the webpage search portal. For example, numerous attempts were made to use of the webpage search portal to identify contributions mentioning the terms ‘IFAW’ and ‘International Fund for Animal Welfare’. The IFAW term consistently revealed 14 of 13,749 results, all of which included the term IFAW. But the term ‘International Fund for Animal Welfare’ (search attempted both enclosed in quotations and without) showed inconsistent results (the most frequent results being 52 of 13,749 and 181 of 13,749) and the webpage froze every time attempts were made to access results beyond the first page (10 results per page), and most of the accessible results did not mention ‘International Fund for Animal Welfare’ or IFAW. Additionally, with all search terms, instances of results not showing

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<sup>10</sup>European Commission, “About this Initiative.”

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid; also see European Commission, “Factual Summary Report of the Public Consultation and Call For Evidence on ‘Trade in Seal Products – Fitness Check of EU Rules.’”

<sup>13</sup>European Commission, “About this initiative.”

<sup>14</sup>European Commission, “Feedback and Statistics.”

through keyword searches but being discovered during a manual review of all comments occurred.

The feedback search portal is a general use tool but appears to work inconsistently, and this has impacted conclusions about the frequency of submissions and content based on search terms. A full manual review and coding of all submissions would be able to provide comprehensive conclusions. More details on submission results should be available when the European Commission publishes its delayed final report, not published as of November 2025. This paper includes a preliminary review of this data set and hopes to bring awareness to it as a source for further research on the subject.

The fitness check enables the inclusion of contemporary views from activists and their supporters and sealers and their support. It is a valuable resource to provide ongoing reflection on earlier statements, such as the 2008 impact assessment for the European Commission in the lead up to the establishment of the EU 2009 seal product ban.<sup>15</sup> The 2008 impact assessment report was undertaken to analyse the animal welfare aspects of seal hunting and the potential impact of a seal product ban. The report indicates ‘that seals can be killed rapidly and effectively, without causing avoidable pain, distress and suffering, using a variety of methods. However, there is reported evidence that in practice effective killing does not always happen’.<sup>16</sup> The report concludes that a seal product ban would have only a minor economic impact on EU member states, assuming that ‘transshipment of sealskins and other seal products and imports of sealskins for further processing and exports can continue. The impacts are assessed to be slightly more significant for non-EU range state’.<sup>17</sup> But as this paper demonstrates, the market was almost completely closed as of 2009 and the negative impacts from the ban were extensive for various northern-based rural and coastal communities and cultures.

## Situated in the literature

Acknowledgement and exploration of the relationship between framing and use of morality in public discourse and regulatory framing of sealing<sup>18</sup> and the role of IFAW in shaping public perception of seals and sealing<sup>19</sup> has been extensively researched by social science scholars. This paper is embedded in this literature in combination with the literature on legitimacy and stigma, anti-sealing activisms and the EU’s approach towards seals and sealing.<sup>20</sup> In particular, this paper is situated within explorations of issues of legitimacy, stigma and colonial legacies in environmental and animal rights activism and

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<sup>15</sup>Commission of the European Communities.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>18</sup>Ogbonna, “Protecting Human Rights as Public Morals Under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) 1994”; Das and Narayan, “Settling the Debate of Animal Welfare, Public Morals and Trade”; Sykes, *Animal Welfare and International Trade Law*; Renner, “Animal Protection as Animal Welfare and Anti-cruelty”; and Fitzgerald, “Morality May Not Be Enough to Justify the EU Seal Products Ban.”

<sup>19</sup>Barry, *Icy Battleground*

<sup>20</sup>e.g. Suuronen et al., “Reassessing the Management Criteria of Growing Seal Populations: The Case of Baltic Grey Seal and Coastal Fishery”; Svendsen et al., “Shifts in Small-scale Fishing in fishing in Åland: An Overview of Changes in An Overview of Changes in”; Sykes, “Sealing Animal Welfare into the GATT Exceptions: The International Dimension of Animal Welfare in WTO Disputes”; Sellheim, *Legislating the Blind Spot: The EU Seal Regime and the Newfoundland Seal Hunt*; and Allen, “Anti Sealing as an Industry.”

EU seal-focused policies, as examined by scholars, such as Naja Dyrendom Graugaard, Darren Chang and Danita Catherine Burke.

Graugaard's and Chang's work offers a critical analysis of sealing debates that foregrounds Indigenous rights, moral authority and colonial structures in environmental and animal advocacy. Graugaard demonstrates that contemporary conflicts over Inuit sealing, sustainability and EU or international regulation cannot be separated from Kalaallit Nunaat's colonial and postcolonial history, which have repeatedly defined Inuit sealing through outdated Eurocentric moral and environmental frameworks.<sup>21</sup> Chang extends this critique by situating anti-sealing activism within settler colonial capitalism, arguing that Western animal advocacy campaigns, particularly those portraying sealing as inherently cruel, often reproduce white supremacist and colonial assumptions while sidelining Indigenous voices.<sup>22</sup> Both scholars show how such activism, including the EU bans and NGO campaigns, has had profound material consequences for Inuit livelihoods, reinforcing economic marginalisation under the guise of moral progress.

But it is Burke's work in which this paper is embedded as it continues the exploration of the relationship between legitimacy and stigma and how the sealing debate is involved and the EU's role in impacting the lives of rural and coastal Indigenous and non-Indigenous sealing communities. Burke's work has extensively examined anti-sealing activism and its legacy, cultural impacts and moral legitimacy of environmental and animal rights campaigns in the North Atlantic and Arctic regions. Through the relationship between stigmatisation and cultural violence, as exhibited by framing sealers as immoral, actors were able to normalise and justify harmful actions against fishers/sealers and their families, resulting in deep social and economic repercussions for this minority cultural practices.<sup>23</sup>

Burke calls for acknowledgement and accountability by activist organisations. Her work to date primarily focuses on Greenpeace and its historical role in the anti-sealing movement.<sup>24</sup> This call for accountability builds on her examination of Greenpeace's moral legitimacy in Kalaallit Nunaat and Northern Canada and commitment to non-violence in activism in the light of its anti-sealing activism.<sup>25</sup> Her work also examines the complexities of activists and the EU moralising of sealing on how rightsholders and stakeholders in the Circumpolar North now perceive them and consider their compatibility with working relationships, such as Arctic Council observership.<sup>26</sup>

This paper builds on Burke's exploration of stigmatisation as a key element of the anti-sealing activism repertoire. It complements the work on colonialism and Indigenous rights by scholars, such as Graugaard and Chang, though like Burke's body of work, it more broadly emphasises the wider experiences of rural and coastal working class Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and communities. This paper also fits within the themes and lines of argumentation advanced in Burke's scholarship by similarly

<sup>21</sup> Graugaard, "Without Seals, There are No Greenlanders"; and Graugaard, *Tracing Seal – Unsettling Narratives of Kalaallit Seal Relations*.

<sup>22</sup> Chang, "Tensions in Contemporary Indigenous and Animal Advocacy Struggles."

<sup>23</sup> Burke, *Cultural Violence, Stigma and the Legacy of the Anti-Sealing Movement*

<sup>24</sup> Burke, "The Case for a Greenpeace Apology."

<sup>25</sup> Burke, "Re-establishing Legitimacy After Stigmatization"; *Greenpeace in the Circumpolar North*; "The Relationship Between Kanniqtugaapik/Clyde River and Greenpeace."

<sup>26</sup> Burke, "Re-establishing Legitimacy After Stigmatization"; *Diplomacy and the Arctic Council*; "The Relationship Between Kanniqtugaapik/Clyde River and Greenpeace"; *WWF and Arctic Environmentalism*; and Burke and Bondaroff, "Becoming an Arctic Council NGO Observer."

pointing to the central role of the relationship between legitimacy and stigma in helping us to understand the evolution of the EU's role in the sealing debate.

## Legitimacy and Stigma

The inspiration for this paper's theoretical perspective comes from Burke and the scholars that inspired Burke's scholarship. These scholars are predominately from legitimacy and stigma literature, such as Lister,<sup>27</sup> Goffman<sup>28</sup> and Link and Phelan.<sup>29</sup>

Legitimacy is a multi-faceted and contested concept<sup>30</sup> that is connected to the attribution of stigma.<sup>31</sup> In broad terms, legitimacy is 'having the right to be and do something in society', and in the context of NGOs and their role in society, legitimacy is 'a sense that an organization is lawful, proper, admissible and justified in doing what it does, and saying what it says and that it continues to enjoy the support of an identifiable constituency'.<sup>32</sup> Legitimacy also provides an actor with credibility and acts as 'a signaling device' used to demonstrate that an NGO is a rightful actor operating in a positive manner for the benefit of the society.<sup>33</sup>

Legitimacy is also associated 'with moral justifications for political and social action',<sup>34</sup> with moral legitimacy being the central form of legitimacy that NGOs tend to rely on to justify their place in society and their work in it.<sup>35</sup>

Moral legitimacy is socially constructed by giving and considering the reasons for justifying certain actions, practices or institutions ... audiences can assess an organization's moral legitimacy by evaluating ... outputs and consequences (doing the rights things), techniques and procedures (doing things rights), categories and structures (the right organization for the job), and leaders and representatives (the right person in charge of the tasks).<sup>36</sup>

For non-state actors, such as activists and social movements to effectively do their work, they 'must encourage outsiders of the legitimacy of their cause(s), often without the benefit of nationalism or other existing cultural or moral resources'.<sup>37</sup> As such 'NGOs may seek to influence government policy disinterestedly ... but they can also lobby governments for more self-interested reasons'<sup>38</sup> and this self-interested lobbying increasingly raises questions concerning their attitudes, actions and beliefs and the representativeness of their agendas.

The complexities of conferring legitimacy are tied to the attribution of stigma, as both concepts are concerned with the conferring of moral judgement. In the case of legitimacy, particularly moral legitimacy, the conferring of this form of legitimacy is connected to

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<sup>27</sup>Lister, "NGO Legitimacy."

<sup>28</sup>Goffman, *Stigma*.

<sup>29</sup>Link and Phelan, "Conceptualizing Stigma."

<sup>30</sup>Mulligan, "The Uses of Legitimacy in International Relations."

<sup>31</sup>Burke, "Re-establishing Legitimacy After Stigmatization."

<sup>32</sup>Edwards, "Legitimacy and Values in NGOs and Voluntary Organizations," 258 as quoted in Lister, "NGO Legitimacy," 176.

<sup>33</sup>Burke, "Re-establishing Legitimacy after Stigmatization," 2.

<sup>34</sup>Atack, "Four Criteria of Development NGO Legitimacy," 857.

<sup>35</sup>Burke, "Re-establishing Legitimacy After Stigmatization."

<sup>36</sup>Liu et al., "Managing Branding and Legitimacy," 635.

<sup>37</sup>Lowe, "War for the Seals," 71.

<sup>38</sup>Atack, "Four Criteria of Development NGO Legitimacy," 858.

a ‘positive normative evaluation’.<sup>39</sup> In contrast, the attribution of stigma is intended to expose ‘something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier’.<sup>40</sup>

There is no set definition for stigma, but it generally refers to a negative perception of someone, some group, something or some way of being or conducting oneself.<sup>41</sup> Stigma ‘is an attribute that conveys devalued stereotypes’<sup>42</sup> with the intent to be ‘deeply discrediting’ for whomever or whatever is attributed to the stigma.<sup>43</sup> Pescosolido and Martin<sup>44</sup> define stigma as ‘the mark, the condition or status that is subject to devaluation’, whereas stigmatisation is ‘the social process by which the mark [of stigma] affects the lives of all those touched by it’.<sup>45</sup> Thornicroft et al. provides a more flushed out definition and argues that ‘stigma refers to problems of knowledge (ignorance), attitudes (prejudice) and behaviour (discrimination)’.<sup>46</sup> Stigma can lead to negative discrimination and ‘is sometimes but not always related to a lack of knowledge about the condition that led to stigmatization’.<sup>47</sup> In other words, people can discriminate against someone or something they know has a stigma while lacking knowledge as to how that stigma came about.

Stigma matters because it signifies devaluation and the signalling out of someone or something as undesirable and unwanted. This devaluation in turn can be used to justify negative, and potentially harmful, attitudes, actions, behaviours and ways of thinking towards entities and individuals. Bruce Link and Jo Phelan, in their work on conceptualising stigma, note that: ‘[a]n almost immediate consequence of successful negative labeling and stereotyping is the general downward placement of a person in a status hierarchy’.<sup>48</sup> The loss of social status contributes to an increased risk for those stigmatised of facing discrimination, cultural stereotyping and negative social and psychological experiences. Specifically, status loss and discrimination are ‘facilitated by labeling, stereotyping and separating’.<sup>49</sup>

Stigma ‘acquires its meaning through the emotion it generates within the person bearing it and the feeling and behaviour towards him of those affirming it’.<sup>50</sup> Robert Page’s work on stigma suggests that ‘[a]ny discussion of socially inferior attributes (stigmas) necessarily requires some consideration of the question of social normality’<sup>51</sup> and ‘there is likely to be some agreement concerning what can loosely be regarded as the “major” social norms in society’.<sup>52</sup> While not all norm infractions necessarily result in stigmas for norm violators, ‘stigma has tended to be associated with those inferior attributes which are commonly regarded as major norm infractions’.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Suchman, “Managing Legitimacy,” 579 as quoted in Hampel and Tracey, “Introducing a Spectrum of Moral Evaluation,” 11.

<sup>40</sup>Goffman, *Stigma*, 1

<sup>41</sup>Page, *Stigma*, 2.

<sup>42</sup>Clair, “Stigma,” 1.

<sup>43</sup>Goffman, *Stigma*, 3.

<sup>44</sup>Pescosolido and Martin, “The Stigma Complex,” 91.

<sup>45</sup>Page, *Stigma*, 16.

<sup>46</sup>Thornicroft et al., “Stigma,” 192.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Link and Phelan, “Conceptualizing Stigma,” 371.

<sup>49</sup>Barnett, “Stigma as Social Control,” 449.

<sup>50</sup>Page, *Stigma*, 1.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 4.

Link and Phelan argue that ‘stigmatization is entirely contingent on access to social, economic and political power that allows the identification of differentness, the construction of stereotypes, the separation of labeled persons into distinct categories and the full execution of disapproval, rejection, exclusion and discrimination’.<sup>54</sup> Specifically, Link and Phelan point out that four interrelated components must converge for stigma to exist.<sup>55</sup>

- (1) ‘people distinguish and label human differences’;
- (2) ‘dominant cultural beliefs link labelled persons to undesirable characteristics – to negative stereotypes’;
- (3) ‘labeled persons are placed in distinct categories so as to accomplish some degree of separation of “us” from “them”’; and
- (4) ‘labeled persons experience status loss and discrimination that lead to unequal outcomes’.<sup>56</sup>

For stigma to form and ‘stick’, power is a central element of the relationship between a ‘stigmatized social group and the dominant referent group’.<sup>57</sup> Specifically, ‘without the power to make devaluing labels result in status loss and discrimination, the cognitive components fail to result in “stigma” in any meaningful sense because they fail to affect the life chances of the labeled group’.<sup>58</sup> In effect, ‘[p]ower enables stigmatizers to limit the life chances of the stigmatized’.<sup>59</sup>

*The Origins of the Stigmatization of Sealing and Sealers:*

Link and Phelan’s four interrelated elements of stigmatisation (see end of previous section) outline the factors that converge for stigma to exist and are a useful lens to analyse and observe how sealing and sealers find themselves labouring under an enduring stigma.<sup>60</sup> The process of stigmatising sealing and sealers began with the distinguishing and labelling of sealers as ‘others’ starting with the targeting of rural Newfoundlanders. The ‘othering’ of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians as sub-humans compared to other Canadians became a prominent feature of anti-sealing activism. Burke argues that this othering was, in part, so effective because Newfoundland and Labrador were newly Canadian, having only joined Canada in 1949, around 10–20 years before anti-sealing messaging gained a lot of national and international attention and support.<sup>61</sup>

The labelling of sealers in stereotypical, derogatory ways was built around a bastardisation of their way of life and its value and meaning for them and their cultural communities both historically and contemporaneously. A good illustration of this is a voice message left for a Newfoundland sealer featured in the 2005 documentary, *My Ancestors Were Rogues and Murderers* about the Newfoundlander sealer’s experience with anti-sealing activism:

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<sup>54</sup>Link and Phelan, 367.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Barnett, “Stigma as Social Control,” 449.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Link and Phelan, “Conceptualizing Stigma,” 367.

<sup>61</sup>Burke, “The Case for a Greenpeace Apology to Newfoundland and Labrador.”

Would you like a meat hook stuck in your brain? Lay off the animal rights people. I think it's fucking reprehensible. You people out there, you don't even know whose money you're living off of. You're living off of Central Canada and Western Canada. You can't even make your own fucking way in life. If you don't like it get the fuck out of our country you fucking assholes.<sup>62</sup>

This sort of message is not uncommon, and the singling out and abusing of sealers is a shared family and community experience.

The othering of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians was a traumatic experience for fishers/sealers, their families and communities who endured widespread alienation, shaming and the negative characterisation of their culture and socio-economic practices, traditions and heritage.<sup>63</sup> The stereotyping of sealers is not exclusive to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians; other Canadian-based sealers from the Quebec North Shore and the Magdalen Islands were also early targets of anti-sealing activists.

The stereotype that emerged about Newfoundlander/Canadian sealers is the *de facto* symbol of the 'other' in the siege-like anti-sealing war; the less-than humane, cruel, savage sealer who needs education to let go of the past and become civilised. Now the messaging is generalised onto all sealers. Sealers are portrayed as greedy, sadistic, cruel murderers and Indigenous/Inuit hunters deal with a caricature of indigeneity that only permits them to hunt seals provided there is limited financial gain from the practice.<sup>64</sup>

The discrimination and status loss of sealers after years of intense anti-sealing narratives and activities has resulted in unequal outcomes causing disadvantages. The mainstream public view in Western countries is dominated by anti-sealing narratives that simplify and distort accepted sealing traditions, cultures and practices. For example, as one Swedish contributor to the 2024 EU public consultations demonstrates: 'Baby seals are CLUBBED TO DEATH, TORTURED TO DEATH and bleed to death crying looking at their mothers . . . Violent animal hating and animal abusing men . . . They only care about money'.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, Robert Nichols from the United Kingdom, equates seal hunters with domestic abusers and being inbred:

The clubbers I assume have families? Studies have shown that slaughterhouse workers have a much higher percentage of depression, suicides, domestic abuse not only to their partners but to their children as well . . . the British government continues to fund these inbreds to the tune of millions per annum, solely so they can continue to kill in a frenzied out of control bloodlust.<sup>66</sup>

The sentiments are not an isolated instance of hatred openly expressed about and towards sealers, with sealers in Newfoundland, for example, reporting threats to torture and murder of their children and grandchildren from anti-sealing supporters for decades.<sup>67</sup>

A prominent disadvantage resulting from the discrimination against sealing and sealers is the economic hardship that resulted from the stigmatisation of seal products

<sup>62</sup>Troake, *My Ancestors Were Rogues and Murderers*.

<sup>63</sup>Patey, *A Battle Lost*; Troake, *My Ancestors Were Rogues and Murderers*; Roswell, *1977 Sealing Activities by Newfoundland Landsmen and Ships on the Front*.

<sup>64</sup>Burke, *Cultural Violence, Stigma and the Legacy of the Anti-Sealing Movement*.

<sup>65</sup>Capitalised type in original text; European Commission. "Feedback and Statistics," Feedback – F3482492.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid, Feedback – F3470732.

<sup>67</sup>CBC The Broadcast, "Sealer Reacts to Call for Greenpeace to Apologize to Sealers in NL"; and Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, "Tuesday, November 7, 2006. Number 022, 1st session, 39th Parliament."

and the loss of market access; economic hardship that was downplayed in the 2008 impact assessment that helped inform the 2009 EU seal product ban.<sup>68</sup> The negative impact is also not exclusively economic; issues of loss of identity, traditional knowledge about seals, other marine life and local ecosystems, cultural resilience and heritage have also been undermined and continue to be harmed to this day.<sup>69</sup> The Government of the Northwest Territories (NWT) in the Canadian Arctic points to the negative impact of stigma against sealing in its submission to the 2024 EU public consultations:

the regulation has effectively stigmatized the purchase of these items and ultimately decimated the entire European market for seal no matter how it was harvested. It has effectively eliminated all incentive for EU businesses to trade seal pelts and products with the NWT, hindering opportunity for Indigenous peoples to sell seal products to EU residents . . . It has also negatively impacted incentive to harvest seal, resulting in a loss of traditional knowledge, cultural practices, and cultural identity.<sup>70</sup>

Echoing the NWT, a Canadian Inuit artist reflected in their consultation feedback:

The EU's regulation . . . on trade in seal products . . . has disproportionately affected and negatively impacts myself (an Inuit Artist & Fashion Designer) along with many other Inuit and Indigenous artists, designers, seamstresses, hunters, Indigenous communities and residents of the Northwest Territories, Canada. . . . The damage to the sealing industry by anti-seal groups is immense, spreading inaccurate depictions and vilifying the seal hunt much to our detriment. Its [*sic*] time to put an end to pressure from groups that have no interest in or cultural connections to seal, yet whose influence greatly negatively impacts Indigenous peoples and communities.<sup>71</sup>

But the discrimination of sealing negatively impacts all fishers/sealers regardless of ethnicity and nationality, not just Indigenous sealers and their communities.

The Maritime Fishermen's Union, which represents 'inshore owner-operator fishermen in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, Canada', implores the EU to consider 'the severe socioeconomic impacts of the bans as currently implemented'.<sup>72</sup> This impact is also noted by Newfoundland and Labrador Member of Parliament and Shadow Minister for Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Clifford Small, who is from rural Newfoundland and whose family was personally impacted by the EU ban:

The 2009 EU ban on the importing of seal products sealed the fate of our ecosystem, because the EU was our main market. [O]ur Indigenous communities that relied on the EU market and depended on non-Indigenous partnerships to gain market access, saw their traditional way of life be destroyed. The "moral obligation" to ban our seal products was anything but moral! Please stop listening to activists . . . instead listen to the communities who have suffered the impacts of this misinformation.<sup>73</sup>

The discrimination and status loss of sealers goes beyond Canada, too.

In the EU seal hunting takes place in the (Kingdom of) Denmark [predominately Kalaallit Nunaat], Estonia, Latvia, Finland and Sweden, three of the five of which are

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<sup>68</sup>Commission of the European Communities.

<sup>69</sup>Graugaard, "'Without Seals, There are No Greenlanders': Colonial and Postcolonial Narratives of Sustainability and Lluit Seal Hunting"; and Chang, "Tensions in Contemporary Indigenous and Animal Advocacy Struggles: The Commercial Seal Hunt as a Case Study."

<sup>70</sup>European Commission. "Feedback and Statistics," Feedback – F3483560.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid, Feedback – F3482152.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid, Feedback – F3489331.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid, Feedback – F3488990.

Arctic states.<sup>74</sup> Despite being within the EU (except Kalaallit Nunaat), these countries' ability to freely use seals is curtailed by both the EU regulations against seals and the stigma associated with sealing and seal products. For example, '[i]n Greenland, the number of seals caught and of seal skins sold on the domestic or the international markets in the period 2014–2017 shows a huge decrease compared to the period before the EU Seal Regime'.<sup>75</sup> The Arctic states stress the cultural, historical and economic importance of sealing, the detrimental impacts of ballooning seal populations on marine ecosystems and fishing industries and call for change in how the EU approaches the subject.

The reported government observations above align with some local views in Finland, Sweden and Denmark. A Finnish fisherman, for example, reflected in the consultation on the interconnected economic and cultural fabric of sealing on coastal Finnish society, which is negatively disrupted by EU regulations:

Over the centuries, the traditional trapping culture of the islands has been on three legs: fishing, seal hunting and seabird hunting. In modern times, two out of three bones have been cut off through legislation and administrative decisions and directives . . . [an] imbalance occurs with seals when the island is not allowed to play their historic role. Whereas the people threatened with extinction and de facto extinction are the genuine archipelago population, the people who have lived there . . . Nowadays, no restaurant can offer a traditional archipelago menu because key parts of this menu are based on raw materials that cannot be sold.<sup>76</sup>

A consultation submission from Finnish resident Alf Hjerpe commented that '[t]he seal population is clearly too large as local fishermen . . . see their catches eaten and/or damaged' by seals resulting in low profitability resulting in '[m]any fishermen [having] stopped [fishing] for this reason'.<sup>77</sup> Finally, a submission on behalf of the MTK: Maa- ja metsätaloustuottajain Keskusliitto (MTK: Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners) notes: 'From the point of view of the sustainable use of natural resources, it is wasted to burie [*sic* – bury] seals on land instead of using the catch into commercial products . . . The current ban on trade in seal products leads in practice to activities, which is contrary to the ethical principles of both professionals and hunters'.<sup>78</sup> The concern with the ethical implications of the EU ban is not isolated to Finnish fishers/sealers.

Swedish hunter Anja Kjellsson, for example, wrote of the EU ban: 'Entirely absurd . . . fantastic seal products; skin, seal oil/tran, and seal meat must not be handled = sold or replaced [*sic* – placed] as other game products . . . Moreover, it is unethical and offensive for me as a hunter not to take care of (including selling) the whole animal that has felled in a legal, sustainable management [hunt] in Sweden'.<sup>79</sup> Kjellsson's comments are echoed by Gunnar Andersson, a Swedish resident, who also questions the logic and ethics of the EU ban and the motivations behind it: 'The current ban on trade in seal products is

<sup>74</sup>European Commission, "Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council"; and European Commission, "Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the Implementation of Regulation."

<sup>75</sup>European Commission, "Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council," 17.

<sup>76</sup>European Commission. "Feedback and Statistics," Feedback – F3474729.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid, Feedback – F3479384.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid, Feedback – F3471311.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid, Feedback – F3468535.

illogical . . . the ban appears to be rooted in the gulling [*sic* – culling] of seal pups . . . According to a traditional standard system, killing an animal by hunting and then only discarding the body can be seen as offensive’.<sup>80</sup>

In Denmark, as well, entities like the Danmarks jægerforbund/Danish Farmers’ Federation are increasingly willing to now show support for sustainable seal hunting, telling the EU: ‘The ban on trade in seal products . . . runs counter to the principles of sustainable use of legally hunted games under Danish game management’ and that ‘products from the hunted game should, in principle, be legally traded’.<sup>81</sup> Professor Kurt Buchmann of the University of Copenhagen, a leading Parasitologist with extensive experience working on cod and seals in the Arctic and Baltic regions,<sup>82</sup> highlights that seals are having a significant negative impact on local marine life, including cod reproduction: ‘The EU rules on trade are not the only problem, but they represent a significant problem in the complex . . . This colonization [of seals] is associated with a devastating reduction of fisheries and the number of fishermen on the island [Bornholm]: bankruptcy of fishing companies/fishermen’.<sup>83</sup>

The governments of Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Kalaallit Nunaat have also been vocal about their concerns with the EU seal product trade ban, echoing sentiments expressed by some of their concerned citizens. Finland, for example, reports that ‘the impact of the Regulation has gone beyond its intended purpose’ and that the ‘EU should seriously consider amending the Regulation banning the trade in seal products to reduce the significant negative socioeconomic effects of the ban on fisheries and on the hunting culture’.<sup>84</sup> The Finnish government claims the ban has contributed to the current poor state of coastal fishing and significantly downgraded the value of seals as game species’. Furthermore, ‘50% of Finnish citizens have a positive attitude towards small-scale trade in seal products’ and Finland argues its domestic seal hunting is conducted in a sustainable manner, respectful of animal welfare and with consideration to utilising the ‘all parts of the caught animal’ and therefore ‘should not raise public moral concerns’.<sup>85</sup>

Sweden also points out the irony of the EU regulations based on environmental sustainability concerns and morality. Sweden notes: ‘while seals are being legally hunted in the Baltic Sea, the catch can only be used in the hunter’s own household or it ends up as waste in landfills, which could be seen as non-sustainable from an environmental as well as ethical perspective’.<sup>86</sup> It also reiterated concerns with what it views as the unethical side-effects of EU regulations:

Swedish hunting ethics, an animal must be hunted in a humane manner and the resulting resource should be fully used for the hunt to be considered acceptable. As the seal hunters, after collecting what they need for their personal use, have to destroy or dump this valuable

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid, Feedback – F3469843.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid, Feedback – F3471024.

<sup>82</sup>e.g. Buchmann, “Seals, fish, humans and parasites in the Baltic.”

<sup>83</sup>Ibid, Feedback – F3470643.

<sup>84</sup>European Commission, “Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council,” 9; and European Commission, “Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the implementation of Regulation,” 9.

<sup>85</sup>European Commission, “Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council,” 8.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 9.

resource, Sweden considers that the ban goes against these ethics and makes the seal hunt less attractive.<sup>87</sup>

Finally, the Kingdom of Denmark stresses the importance of sealing in Kalaallit Nunaat. Both Denmark and Kalaallit Nunaat claim that though ‘Inuit or other communities are not covered by the import ban, the ban has led to a large drop in the sales of Greenlandic sealskins to the EU market’ and that the EU needs to do more ‘to better inform the public on Greenland’s right to export sealskins’.<sup>88</sup> In particular, the Kalaallit Nunaat Ministry of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture highlights that nowadays legitimate and sustainable sealing activities ‘should not be hampered or stigmatized’,<sup>89</sup> but at present, this is what is happening.

### IFAW and the 2009 EU seal product ban

As previously stated, ‘[p]ower enables stigmatizers to limit the life chances of the stigmatized’, and the preceding section provides readers with a sense of the negative impacts experienced by fishers/sealers, their families and communities across the Circumpolar North as a result of the EU seal product ban.<sup>90</sup> The 2009 EU seal product ban language is moralising about the act of sealing, and this language is not by accident. The EU ban echoes animal rights focused anti-sealing activist perspectives, and the influence of IFAW is particularly evident as IFAW ‘celebrates the fact that the EU ban on seal products occurred at its instigation’.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, engagement is necessary with IFAW’s history with, and understanding of, seal hunting and their part in influencing the normalisation of stigma against sealing and sealers through their lobbying of the EU.

IFAW was central to the EU’s moral framing and banning of sealing and seal products; a point IFAW proudly promotes on its website.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, IFAW’s key role was acknowledged by the former Canadian Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, John Crosbie: ‘IFAW has been the primary force behind an emotionally charged and obsessive campaign to end commercial sealing’.<sup>93</sup> To its end, IFAW similarly self-identifies as a driving force in the decline of sealing practices; it credits itself, and the European politicians it lobbied, for bringing about a 90% decrease in the number of Canadian sealers since the 1990s.<sup>94</sup> IFAW’s position is that ‘commercial sealing should be prohibited as they are inherently cruel, unnecessary and can pose a serious threat to the survival of these species’.<sup>95</sup> In fact, IFAW was founded by Brian Davies in 1969 to explicitly target the harp seal hunts in Northeastern Canada.<sup>96</sup>

IFAW has always been a leader in campaigning against sealing. It led the wave of anti-sealing campaigning that began in the late 1960s and picked up momentum in the

<sup>87</sup>European Commission, “Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the implementation of Regulation,” 9.

<sup>88</sup>European Commission, “Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council,” 8.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>90</sup>Barnett, “Stigma as Social Control,” 449.

<sup>91</sup>Burke, “Canada-EU summit.”

<sup>92</sup>IFAW, “Our History.”

<sup>93</sup>Barry, *Icy Battleground*, viii.

<sup>94</sup>IFAW, “Ending the Commercial Seal Hunt.”

<sup>95</sup>IFAW, “Guiding Principles.”

<sup>96</sup>IFAW, “Ending the Commercial Seal Hunt”; and Davies, *Savage Luxury*.

1970s and is largely seen to be the leader of it,<sup>97</sup> attacking the practice of seal hunting and the people that participated in the industry ‘through [a] massive, worldwide publicity campaign[s] against the “barbaric slaughter of baby whitecoat seals”’.<sup>98</sup> While many organisations participated in elements of the anti-sealing movement, IFAW was at the forefront with actions, such as media stunts, coordinating public film screenings, leading protests and circulating pamphlet mailing and protest mail-in letters in addition to political lobbying.<sup>99</sup>

During its anti-sealing campaigning IFAW reportedly focused on documenting and photographing ‘alleged atrocities of the hunt and disseminat[ing] powerful graphic images globally’.<sup>100</sup> But IFAW’s decades-long campaign is characterised by ‘sociological warfare’, which according to Brian Lowe ‘is a conflict that is intended to alter one or more aspects of the public moral imagination regarding at least one issue, practice, or phenomena’.<sup>101</sup> IFAW worked against sealing both in the public domain and behind the scenes in European politics. For example, IFAW’s founder, Brian Davies, was reportedly the ‘EEC’s “special advisor” on the seal dossier!’ And during his time in this role, reports from the ‘EEC rapporteur to EEC [was] advising strong continuation of the ban’ [the first 1983 ban]. There is also a suggestion that during this time period, the EEC’s observer to the Canadian seal hunt in 1985 was potentially financed by IFAW: ‘This man (Muntigh), by the way, was sent this Spring to Canada to observe sealing, apparently at the expense of Monsieur Brian Davies’.<sup>102</sup>

IFAW fostered the view that sealers and their families are backward, immoral and savage and was not reportedly using misleading imagery to garner support and reinforce its position. For example, allegedly in March 1984:

about 100 residents of Havre-aux-Maisons on the Magdalen Islands overturned a \$375,000 helicopter owned by the IFAW. Protesting the IFAW’s erosion of their income from the annual seal hunt, the islanders damaged the helicopter heavily, along with \$5,000 worth of camera equipment, and force the four fund workers to surrender their film and videotapes of the hunt before allowing them to leave. The helicopter was empty when it was overturned, but the IFAW crew returned the next day to take video pictures of one another scrambling out of it as though the incident had just occurred . . . this tape is being shown as more proof of the homicidal brutality of Canadian seal hunters.<sup>103</sup>

Sea Shepherd, a supportive organisation of the anti-sealing cause, has a different take on the incident. Sea Shepherd reflects that the helicopter incident – which it states occurred in 1983 – was an attack that ‘was videotaped’, and they emphasise that the ‘RCMP and Quebec Provincial Police (QPP) watched . . . [stressing that] no sealers were charged’.<sup>104</sup>

IFAW’s seal campaigning has also been profitable. In 1981, during the heyday of the anti-sealing protests, IFAW reportedly raised ‘funds through direct mail appeals and newspaper advertisements’ with an income of \$3,207,982.<sup>105</sup> If it is assumed that this

<sup>97</sup>Barry, *Icy Battleground*.

<sup>98</sup>Patey, *A Battle Lost*, 17–9.

<sup>99</sup>Woods, “The Wolf at the Door”; McKibbin, “\$70,000 Video Designed Change Opinion of Seal Hunt”; and IFAW, “Ending the Commercial Seal Hunt.”

<sup>100</sup>Phelps Bondaroff and Burke, “Bridging Troubled Waters,” 170.

<sup>101</sup>Lowe, “War for the Seals,” 70.

<sup>102</sup>Underline in original text, Herscovici, “Letter from Alan Herscovici to Shelagh Jane Woods Rider.”

<sup>103</sup>Decarie, “Why Canada is Steamrollered by the Animal-welfare Machine.”

<sup>104</sup>Sea Shepherd, “Canada Gives Green Light for Sealers to Violently Oppose Seal Defenders.”

<sup>105</sup>Laurier Archives, “Fonds S469.”

amount is in Canadian dollars (unclear in the cited archive document), then the Bank of Canada's online inflation calculator reveals that in today's money the amount raised is worth approximately \$11 032 000 (based on rate on 31 March 2025) for 1981 alone.<sup>106</sup> So as the economic opportunities for fishers/sealers were under threat, IFAW generated a substantial sum for itself working against them.

It is also trying to project itself as strongly against sealing and supportive of some hunting at the same time; IFAW labels seal hunting as 'slaughter'<sup>107</sup> but purport that 'legal subsistence hunting' is permissible provided that 'hunting is conducted on an ecologically sustainable basis and all precautions taken to minimize the disruption of social structures and the infliction of pain and suffering on the animals killed'.<sup>108</sup> The IFAW guiding principles view community engagement as a route for advocacy. The principle of community engagement is tied to the organisation's stance 'to respectful and inclusive engagement that empowers communities to identify opportunities to address important wildlife conservation issues while incorporating animal welfare considerations'.<sup>109</sup> In practice, however, the impression conveyed is that its work against sealing implies that its willingness to engage and listen to communities is not particularly flexible.

What appears clear is that IFAW and sealers, including Indigenous hunters, are diametrically opposed to one another. IFAW has a guiding principle that 'IFAW is committed to respectful and inclusive engagement that empowers communities identify opportunities to address important wildlife conservation issues while incorporating animal welfare considerations'.<sup>110</sup> On the issue of sealing, however, there appears to be tension on the extent an organisation like IFAW is able to engage a community with an open mind if a community is not willing to align itself with the organisation's world views. This stance is quite possibly impacting perceptions of the legitimacy of the position held by IFAW and EU political allies against sealing in impacted communities.

And there is no mistaking that IFAW is intricately linked to the decision-making made by the EEC and EU politicians. IFAW proudly advertises its close ties with European politicians and its part in facilitating the European anti-sealing regulatory positions:

Our first major victory came in 1982, when Europe voted in favour of a ban on the import of whitecoat harp seal and blueback hooded seal skins . . . our advocacy work was eventually solidified in the greatest victory for animal welfare of all time: The World Trade Organisation confirmed in its final judgment in 2014 that animal welfare concerns are a legitimate reason to restrict trade and that the EU is justified in banning the import and sale of products from cruel seal hunting.<sup>111</sup>

IFAW accomplished its goals in getting the EU to create anti-sealing regulations that adopted their worldview through partnership with EU politicians; 'we partnered with European politicians to implement a European ban on all seal products'.<sup>112</sup> So naturally

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<sup>106</sup>For the inflation calculator see Bank of Canada.

<sup>107</sup>IFAW, "Ending the Commercial Seal Hunt."

<sup>108</sup>IFAW, "Guiding Principles."

<sup>109</sup>Ibid.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid.

<sup>111</sup>Slee, "EU Seal Trade Regulation."

<sup>112</sup>IFAW, "Ending the Commercial Seal Hunt."

IFAW came out in 2024 against amendments to the EU trade bans, as reflected in some EU's public consultation comments.<sup>113</sup>

The overt influence of IFAW in informing public views in Europe about sealing is shown by various contributor comments to the 2024 EU public consultation process on the fitness of the EU seal product ban, though it is not possible to conclusively surmise influence in instances when contributors do not explicitly reference it. But some contributors explicitly source IFAW material. One contributor from France sources IFAW to argue that '[t]he ban on selling seal hunts [products] in the EU should not be called into question'.<sup>114</sup> Another contributor from Belgium posits: 'I understand that there might be a reopening of the horrific seal hunt. Who could back up such barbaric practices and why there should be some need at all is my puzzle'.<sup>115</sup> Another contributor referenced IFAW as inspiring their opinions, stating: 'I find it very undesirable to reopen seal hunting. This is contrary to the standards of fatality, and animal welfare is seriously compromised by this proposal. I have also followed the publication of the IFAW and would like to quote it'.<sup>116</sup> Another Dutch commenter stated: 'In full line with IFAW, I find: The EU regulation on trade in seals is a huge achievement, a milestone and a tremendous victory'.<sup>117</sup>

Overall, there is evidence to argue that EU and European politicians play a major role in legitimatising the stigmatisation of sealing and sealers, and IFAW helped motivate and craft this outcome. Thornicroft et al. note that stigma can lead to negative discrimination and 'is sometimes but not always related to a lack of knowledge about the condition that led to stigmatization'.<sup>118</sup> For stigma to form and 'stick', power is a central element of the relationship between a 'stigmatized social group and the dominant referent group'.<sup>119</sup> The 2024 fitness check of the regulations is possibly, in some small way, a nod to addressing past research and consultation oversight, but to what extent this small window of opportunity for public input will change anything for sealers and their cultures remains to be seen. But as this section showed, the EU has been connected with IFAW and this relationship has influenced its policy and regulatory positions on sealing and sealers to the detriment of many northern rural and coastal fishing communities and peoples.<sup>120</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper addresses the question: In what way is the EU seal product import ban contributing to the stigmatisation of sealing and sealers? It demonstrates how the formation of stigma against sealing and sealers started and took root. It uses the EU's 2024 trade in seal product ban fitness check's public consultation feedback, with archival research and secondary research, to argue for the enduring presence of sealing stigma, the EU's role in empowering it, and the implications of stigma on sealing cultures and communities.

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<sup>113</sup>Slee, "EU Seal Trade Regulation"; European Commission. "Feedback and Statistics," Feedback – F3482051.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid, Feedback – F3477513.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid, Feedback – F3474444.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid, Feedback – F3472138.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid, Feedback – F3472109.

<sup>118</sup>Thornicroft et al., "Stigma," 192.

<sup>119</sup>Barnett et al., "Stigma as Social Control," 449.

<sup>120</sup>IFAW, "Ending the Commercial Seal Hunt."

The stigma against sealing and sealers now encompasses all rural and coastal fishing cultures and their communities who participate in seal hunting and the use of seals in traditional cultural and economic practices regardless of ethnicity. Indigenous cultures and communities are no exception from the negative stigma, despite minor exceptions in EU import regulations, as they face stereotypical and limited understandings of their hunting practices. The EU regulations as they stand promote the erasure of long-standing non-Indigenous cultural and economic heritage, identity and practices through: fostering outcomes that lead to ethical violations in traditional hunting practices; repressing the dynamic multi-purpose use of seals within cultures and economies; and expunging acknowledgement of traditional hunting practices and ethics.

Overall, through an exploration of the EU's role in entrenching and legitimatising stigma on sealing and sealers, this paper speaks to broader themes of cultural violence and NGO legitimacy. There is little evidence to suggest that the messaging against sealing and sealers would have had as profound an impact if it were not for the support activists received from the EEC/EU. Indeed, the European Commission was given to believe in its 2008 impact assessment of a potential ban that a ban would only have minor impacts on affected parties, a conclusion that time has revealed to be misleading and simplistic. Ultimately, it was the EU's ban in 2009 and its use of moral justification for it that gave teeth to the anti-sealing agenda globally. It is unlikely that the stigma fostered by activists would have garnered such an enduring, negative impact on rural and coastal fishers/sealers without the EEC/EU regulations. This situation is illustrative of the impact that policymakers can have in solidifying stigmas by elevating them from personal views of a select few by giving them a veneer of authenticity and representativeness, though upon more critical examination misrepresentations, mis- and partial truths and hidden and unreported instances of violence are revealed.

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