

# ending the commercial seal hunt in Canada

**5 million**

seals saved since 2009

**36**

international trade bans on seals products

**91%**

decrease in the number of seals killed between 2004 and 2019

**395**

harp seals reported killed in 2020, out of an allowable catch of 400,000

**97%**

the decrease in value of the seal hunt from 2006 to 2019

▶ A harp seal pup on the ice in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. A sealing boat positions itself nearby waiting for the start of Canada's 2005 seal hunt.

▶ **see how at [ifaw.org](https://ifaw.org)**

**#ActsForAnimals****Where it all began**

IFAW was founded in 1969 to bring an end to the hunt for whitecoat harp seal pups on the East Coast of Canada. Thanks to our work exposing the cruelty of commercial seal hunts, the European Union banned the importation of products from “whitecoat” harp seals and blueback hooded seals in 1983, saving more than a million newborn seals from slaughter over the next 10 years.

In 1996, the Canadian government revived the commercial seal hunt by increasing quotas and paying fishermen to kill seals. In the years that followed, over 300,000 seals were slaughtered annually for their pelts.

**Inhumane and unnecessary**

Seal hunting in Atlantic Canada is a part-time, seasonal activity that occurs over a few weeks of the year. The products derived from the commercial seal hunt—primarily luxury goods—are unnecessary. Although seal oil was historically used to light the streets of Europe, that is no longer the case. Today, there is no need to commercially hunt seals.

Decades of documenting the cruelty at Canada's commercial seal hunt—from both on the ice and in the air—has led IFAW to come to the same conclusion as numerous independent veterinary reviews: the hunt is inhumane and cannot be conducted

humanely. Over 98% of the seals killed are newly-moulted pups between three weeks and three months of age who have not yet learned to swim or feed themselves.

**Closing markets for seal products**

In 2009, the European Union banned the import and sale of all commercial seal products, with an exemption for those hunted by Inuit or other Indigenous communities. In 2011, Russia also banned the import of harp seal products, closing another main export market for the cruel practice. In 2014, the World Trade Organization (WTO) upheld the EU ban against challenges and an appeal by Canada and Norway, acknowledging the long-standing animal welfare concerns. Today, there are 36 international trade bans on seal products, and commercial seal hunting is in steep decline.

**Supporting alternatives that benefit marine wildlife**

Our campaign continues as we urge the government of Canada to end subsidies to the commercial seal hunt, and instead support efforts that will benefit the ocean ecosystem. Efforts like these include the Clean Harbours Initiative, founded by a former commercial seal hunter who now works to remove marine plastic debris and ghost gear from the ocean.