



Canadian Public Opinion on a European Trade Ban on Seal Products and the Federal Government's Support for Canada's Commercial Seal Hunt

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IFAW Technical Briefing 2008-02
11 July 2008

On the brink of an expected announcement by the European Commission regarding a proposal to ban the trade in seal products, a new poll conducted by Environics Research for the International Fund for Animal Welfare¹ finds that the vast majority of Canadians believe the European Union should be allowed to restrict the trade in seal products.

According to the poll, the majority of Canadians continue to oppose Canada's commercial seal hunt. There is also strong opposition to the continued use of taxpayer dollars by the federal government to defend the seal hunt against a potential European trade ban.

The nation-wide poll found that:

1. The majority of Canadians continue to oppose Canada's commercial seal hunt
2. Canadians overwhelmingly feel that the European Union, and individual European countries, should be allowed to restrict the importation and marketing of seal products.
3. The majority of Canadians are opposed to the Canadian government's move to challenge the existing seal product bans in Belgium and the Netherlands at the World Trade Organization (WTO).
4. The majority of Canadians feel it is a waste of their tax dollars when government funds are used to promote and defend the commercial seal hunt.
5. Canadians do not see a future in the commercial seal hunt. The majority of respondents would like to see the phasing out of this industry.
6. The closing of the seal hunt should be accompanied by investment in employment programs for the affected individuals.

¹ The nation-wide poll sampled 2160 Canadian residents between 13 June and 5 July 2008. Sampling error is 2.2%, 19 in 20. Figures given in this report are for Canadians who responded with an opinion. Questions asked and uncorrected results are provided in Appendix I.

1. Opposition to Canada's commercial seal hunt continues

The majority of Canadians indicated their opposition (58% opposed, including 40% strongly opposed) to Canada's commercial seal hunt, when informed that this hunt has killed over one million animals in the past four years. These results echo the findings of polling results from previous years, including an independent poll conducted by Ipsos Reid earlier this year.²

2. Canadian public opinion towards a potential European Union-wide ban on seal products

Canadian opinion towards a proposed European ban on seal products was clear: a convincing 86% of Canadians felt that the European Union should be allowed to restrict trade in seal products, if it chooses to do so.

According to the Canadian government,³ the EU is Canada's second largest market for seal products, with \$5.41 million in exports in 2006. Provided with this information, the vast majority of Canadians (73%) felt that the value of Canadian seal products exported to Europe was not significant enough to risk an international trade dispute.

- 79% of Canadians agreed with the statement that the federal government should stop spending money and effort defending Canada's commercial seal hunt, and concentrate on more important issues instead.
- Only 17% of respondents felt that the Government of Canada should be doing more to keep European markets open for Canadian seal products.

3. Canadian public opinion on European national bans on seal products

In response to public concerns about commercial sealing, Belgium and the Netherlands have passed national legislation to restrict imports of seal products into their respective countries. These restrictions include seal products from Canada's commercial seal hunt, but exempt those from Inuit seal hunting. In response to these national-level bans, the Canadian government requested formal consultations at the World Trade Organization in September 2007.⁴

- Provided with this information, an overwhelming 84% of Canadians felt that an individual country should be allowed to restrict the importation and marketing of seal products, if it chooses to do so.

² An Ipsos Reid poll from April 2008 found that 52% of Canadians opposed the seal hunt (33% strongly, 19% somewhat, uncorrected figures). Available at <http://www.ipsos-na.com/news/pressrelease.cfm?id=3889>

³ Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada. 2007. Backgrounder. WTO Consultations on Belgian and Dutch decision to ban seal products. Available at <http://www.international.gc.ca/trade-agreements-accords-commerciaux/disp-diff/seal-phoque.aspx?lang=en>

⁴ Ibid.

- A majority of Canadians (55%) said they opposed (including 31% strongly opposed) the Canadian government's move to challenge the import restrictions by Belgium and Netherlands at the World Trade Organization.

4. Canadians do not want to see their taxes wasted on defending the commercial seal hunt

Fisheries Ambassador Loyola Sullivan recently stated in the media that the Canadian government has held between 170 and 180 meetings in Europe on the issue of Canada's commercial seal hunt.⁵

- These overseas efforts are in direct contrast to the wishes of Canadians. The IFAW / Environics poll found that three-quarters (75%) of Canadians are opposed to the federal government's use of tax dollars to send delegations to Europe to promote Canada's commercial seal hunt.
- In fact, a majority of respondents (62%) stated they were opposed to the federal government's use of taxpayer dollars for *any* lobbying efforts to keep international markets open for Canadian seal products.
- 72% of Canadians agreed that using government funds to support and promote Canada's commercial seal hunt is a waste of tax dollars.

5. Canada's commercial seal hunt and visions for the future: end the seal hunt, but provide meaningful employment alternatives.

The polling results suggest that a majority of Canadians think an end to Canada's commercial seal hunt is inevitable. Over two-thirds of respondents said they would be "not at all upset" if the commercial seal hunt were ended.

- Almost two-thirds (65%) of Canadians agreed that the commercial hunting of seals for their fur is an outdated industry that should be phased out.
- 71% of Canadians agreed that a European ban on seal products would encourage Canada to end the commercial seal hunt.
- 72% of Canadians stated that a European ban was a sign of the future and that the Government of Canada should end the seal hunt and invest in alternative employment opportunities for those affected.
- When asked how they would feel if Canada's commercial seal hunt were ended, 81% of Canadians indicated that they would not be upset, including 66% who would be "not at all upset."

⁵ Sullivan, L. 2008. Statement made on Fisheries Broadcast, CBN-AM, St. John's, 7 July 2008.

6. Canadians want the end of Canada's commercial seal hunt to be accompanied by support for the individuals who take part in this seasonal activity.

- 84% of Canadians agreed that the Canadian government should invest in employment programs so that people who now take part in the commercial seal hunt can find other kinds of work.

Appendix I - Detailed Results

Questions are presented in the order referred to in the text.

Q.1 *A commercial seal hunt in Canada which has killed more than one million seals over the last four years takes place. Do you support or oppose the commercial hunting of seals off Canada's Atlantic coast? Would that be strongly or somewhat support/oppose?*

Strongly support	14
Somewhat support	25
Somewhat opposed	16
Strongly oppose	37
DK / NA	8

Q.2 *The European Union might also restrict trade in seal products, including those from Canada's commercial seal hunt. In 2006, Canada exported just over five million dollars worth of seal products to Europe. Could you please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the following statements.*

The European Union should be able to restrict trade in seal products, if it chooses to.

Strongly agree	54
Somewhat agree	28
Somewhat disagree	6
Strongly disagree	7
DK / NA	5

Q3. *The European Union might also restrict trade in seal products, including those from Canada's commercial seal hunt. In 2006, Canada exported just over five million dollars worth of seal products to Europe. Could you please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the following statements.*

The value of the seal products Canada exports to Europe is not significant enough to risk an international trade dispute.

Strongly agree	38
Somewhat agree	27
Somewhat disagree	13
Strongly disagree	11
DK / NA	10

Q4. *Could you please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the following statements about Canada's commercial seal hunt...*

The federal government should stop spending money and effort defending Canada's commercial seal hunt, and concentrate on more important issues instead.

Strongly agree	53
Somewhat agree	22
Somewhat disagree	11
Strongly disagree	9
DK / NA	4

Q5. *The European Union might also restrict trade in seal products, including those from Canada's commercial seal hunt. In 2006, Canada exported just over five million dollars worth of seal products to Europe. Could you please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the following statements...*

The Government of Canada should be doing more to keep European markets open for Canadian seal products.

Strongly agree	6
Somewhat agree	10
Somewhat disagree	23
Strongly disagree	56
DK / NA	5

Q6. *Belgium and the Netherlands have recently restricted imports of seal products into their countries. These restrictions include seal products from Canada's commercial seal hunts, but not those from Inuit seal hunting. In response, the Canadian government has challenged these restrictions at the World Trade Organization.*

a) *Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree that a country should be allowed to restrict the importation and marketing of seal products, if it chooses to?*

Strongly agree	56
Somewhat agree	25
Somewhat disagree	7
Strongly disagree	8
DK / NA	4

b) *Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose the Canadian government's move to challenge the import restrictions by Belgium and the Netherlands at the World Trade Organization?*

Strongly support	19
Somewhat support	22
Somewhat oppose	19
Strongly oppose	31
DK / NA	8

Q7. Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose the federal government using taxpayer dollars to fund each of the following activities?

a) *Sending delegations to Europe to promote Canada's commercial seal hunt.*

Strongly support	10
Somewhat support	14
Somewhat oppose	18
Strongly oppose	54
DK / NA	5

b) *Lobbying to keep international markets open for Canadian seal products.*

Strongly support	14
Somewhat support	22
Somewhat oppose	17
Strongly oppose	41
DK / NA	6

Q8. Could you please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the following statements about Canada's commercial seal hunt ...

a) *Using government funds to support and promote Canada's commercial seal hunt is a waste of your tax dollars.*

Strongly agree	50
Somewhat agree	19
Somewhat disagree	14
Strongly disagree	13
DK / NA	4

b) *The commercial hunting of seals for their fur is an outdated industry that should be phased out.*

Strongly agree	44
Somewhat agree	18
Somewhat disagree	18
Strongly disagree	15
DK / NA	4

Q9. The European Union might also restrict trade in seal products, including those from Canada's commercial seal hunt. In 2006, Canada exported just over five million dollars worth of seal products to Europe. Could you please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the following statements...

a) A European ban on seal products will encourage Canada to end the commercial seal hunt.

Strongly agree	33
Somewhat agree	33
Somewhat disagree	16
Strongly disagree	11
DK / NA	7

b) A move by the European Union to ban seal products is a sign of the future. The Government of Canada should end the seal hunt and invest in alternative employment opportunities for those affected.

Strongly agree	45
Somewhat agree	23
Somewhat disagree	14
Strongly disagree	13
DK / NA	6

Q10. *If Canada's commercial seal hunt were ended, would you be very, somewhat, not very or not at all upset?*

Very upset	5
Somewhat upset	11
Not very upset	15
Not at all upset	66
DK / NA	3

Q11. *Could you please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the following statements about Canada's commercial seal hunt...*

The Canadian government should invest in employment programs so that people who now take part in the commercial seal hunt can find other kinds of work.

Strongly agree	55
Somewhat agree	27
Somewhat disagree	7
Strongly disagree	8
DK / NA	3