

Canada’s East Coast harp seal hunt: how much meat is actually used?

Although Fisheries and Oceans Canada says it supports full utilization¹ in the commercial seal harvest, there is nothing in the Maine Mammal Regulations or Conditions of License requiring full use of seals killed. Video and photographic evidence obtained by licenced NGO observers regularly shows seal carcasses thrown overboard or left of the ice.²

Since 2014, Fisheries and Oceans has refused to release data on the amount of meat landed at the commercial seal harvest, citing privacy concerns³. However, data is available up to 2013 and rough calculations can be conducted to estimate the percentage of usable meat that is landed from the commercial seal harvest.

| Year | Seals killed | Meat landed (kg) | Flippers landed | Total kg available meat | Total kg meat landed (meat + flippers) | Percentage Used |
|-------------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|--|-----------------|
| 2013 ⁴ | 95,221 | 19,960.54 | 16,477 | 476,105 | 36,437 | 7.6% |
| 2012 ⁵ | 67,567 | 9,647 | 27,421 | 337,835 | 37,068 | 10.9% |
| 2011 ⁶ | 37,839 | 1,751 | 16,105 | 189,195 | 17,856 | 9.4% |
| 2010 ⁷ | 65,233 | 26,170 | 21,245 | 326,165 | 47,415 | 14.5% |
| 2009 ⁸ | 53,531 | 14,429 | 1,314 | 267,655 | 15,743 | 5.8% |

Over the past decade, the vast majority of seals taken were between 1 and 3 months of age with over 99 % of the seals taken since 1999 being one year of age or less, or “beater” seals.⁹ For the purposes of these

¹ Fisheries and Oceans Canada. 2011-2015 Integrated Fisheries Management Plan for Atlantic Seals. <http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fm-gp/seal-phoque/reports-rapports/mgtplan-planges20112015/mgtplan-planges20112015-eng.htm>; See also Government Response to the Fourth Report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. Ensuring a Humane and Sustainable Seal Harvest. <http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=3067100&Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=39&Ses=1>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q1ZTW1rFQmM>

³ <http://www.ifaw.org/canada/news/dfo-coOwvers-value-products>

⁴ Fisheries and Oceans Canada. 2014. 2013 and 2014 Seals and Seal By-Products by Species and Product. NL Region. Obtained through Access to Information and Privacy Act. Copy available on request. See also http://www.nfl.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/publications/reports_rapports/Land_All_Vessels_Debarquer_Tous_Les_Navires_2013_eng.htm;

⁵ Fisheries and Oceans Canada. 2012. Landings and Landed Value by Species. All Vessels. Newfoundland and Labrador Region. Last data update October 30, 2012.

⁶ Fisheries and Oceans Canada. 2011. Landings and Landed Value by Species. All Vessels. Newfoundland and Labrador Region. Last data update September 18, 2011.

⁷ Fisheries and Oceans Canada. 2011. Landings and Landed Value by Species. All Vessels. Newfoundland and Labrador Region. Last data update September 01, 2010.

⁸ Fisheries and Oceans Canada. 2011. Landings and Landed Value by Species. All Vessels. Newfoundland and Labrador Region. Last data update September 01, 2010.

calculations, we used an estimate of 5 kg of usable meat available on a seal of this age. Additionally, we estimated that 1 flipper = 1 kg meat. As indicated in the table above, in recent years some 85 - 92% of the potentially usable meat is not landed (wasted at sea) in the course of the commercial seal harvest.

IFAW believes that the commercial hunting of harp seals off Canada's East Coast should be discontinued on the basis that it is inhumane,¹⁰ unnecessary, and economically unviable.¹¹ However, if seals are to be killed, sealers should be held to the same standards as other hunters: they should be required to land all parts of the animal, as is currently stipulated under the Marine Mammal Regulations for other harvested marine mammals in Canada such as cetaceans and walrus¹².

The current Regulations, requiring the landing of either the pelt *or* carcass, encourage the practice of high-grading (killing seals for certain high-value parts such as penises or pelts and discarding the rest of the animal at sea) and violate the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Seals and Sealing. This practice also calls into question the Department's commitment to full utilization by legalizing the wasteful killing and discarding of animal parts.

Sheryl Fink
IFAW Canada
sfink@ifaw.org

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⁹ Stenson, G.B. 2014. Updated Estimates of Harp Seal Removals in the Northwest Atlantic. DFO Can. Sci. Advis. Sec. Res. Doc. 2014/015. v + 35 p. http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/csas-sccs/publications/resdocs-docrech/2014/2014_015-eng.pdf

¹⁰ Butterworth A, Richardson M. A review of animal welfare implications of the Canadian commercial seal hunt. Mar. Policy (2012), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2012.07.006> <http://www.antisealingcoalition.ca/publications/Marine-policy-animal-welfare-seal-hunt-2012.pdf>

¹¹ Livernois, J. 2010. The economics of ending Canada's commercial harp seal hunt. Marine Policy 34(1) 42-53. See also <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/it-just-isnt-worth-it/article4278559/>

¹² Marine Mammal Re-regulations (SOR/93-56) Section 10(2). <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/sor-93-56/FullText.html>