



FAQ
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Frequently Asked Questions

Response

Question...

Does WWF support the hunting of the Canadian harp seal population ?

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Answer...

The harp seal is a migratory species, which is hunted by indigenous people in the North - where the seals spend their winters - as well as by commercial hunters off Newfoundland and Labrador - where the seals have their pups in spring, which starts in March.

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WWF does not support a "cull" - which means setting a level where the long term objective is to reduce the seal population of east coast seal populations. WWF has seen no compelling evidence that seals are responsible for the collapse of cod, or other fish stocks.

However, WWF is not opposed to the annual harvest of harp seals off the east coast of Canada, provided the hunt takes place within a safe conservation regime. A "sustainable" harvest is one where an overall healthy population is either maintained or allowed to increase over the long run.

The Canadian harp seal (Phoca groenlandica) population is currently abundantly healthy - with over 5 million individuals and the hunt poses no threat to the long term health of the population.

WWF Canada supports the sustainable hunting of seals by Inuit. Inuit hunt only adult seals. There are no, or very few harp seal pups in the North, since these seals move south where they rear their pups in spring. Inuit have hunted seals long before non-aboriginal people arrived in North America, because their very existence depends on it. Their primary reason to hunt these seals is for meat.

WWF is convinced that hunting, fishing and gathering by Inuit in Nunavut is the only use that has a chance to out-compete more damaging industrial uses of the landscape and the seas. In other words, if you deny the rights of these indigenous people to hunt, fish and gather wildlife in Nunavut, much of this wildlife would be lost forever.

Furthermore, Inuit rights to hunt are guaranteed in the Nunavut Settlement Agreement, and the Canadian Constitution.

In regard to the commercial hunt for harp seals on the East Coast of Canada. As long as the commercial hunt for harp seals off the coast of Canada is of no threat to the population of over 5 million harp seals, there is no reason for WWF Canada to reconsider its current priorities and actively oppose the annual harvest of harp seals.

WWF Canada's ongoing conservation concern has been that the commercial hunt for harp seals should never threaten the population. We believe harp seals should thrive in the Atlantic Ocean around the Canadian coast, now and in the future.

WWF continues to work diligently on key marine issues in Atlantic Canada, including:

- Saving critical wildlife habitat, such as fish nurseries and spawning areas
- Working to recover threatened and endangered species like the right whales, bottlenose whales, leatherback turtles and cold water corals
- Stopping illegal bilge-oil dumping by ships, which is killing 300 000 seabirds every year in Atlantic Sea.

WWF understands that many people around the world feel strongly about the animal welfare aspects of the commercial seal hunt. There have been legitimate questions raised concerning the enforcement of regulations that are supposed to ensure the hunt is humane.

As a conservation organization, this is not an area where WWF has expertise but we encourage people to contact International Fund for Animal Welfare and the Canadian Sealers Association with their concerns.

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Back to FAQ

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