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EC TO IMPOSE IMPORT BAN
ON BABY SEAL SKINS

European Community Environment Ministers last night voted to impose a two-year ban on EC commercial imports of pelts from baby harp and hooded seals, unless Canada and Norway agree to changes in the methods by which the young seals are hunted.

Under the new EC directive, the import ban would take effect on October 1, 1983, leaving the EC Commission time to seek an agreement on hunting practices in the two sealing countries that would make an import ban unnecessary. The directive would not apply to imports of products from the traditional hunts carried out by Eskimo populations.

The EC Council of Ministers ordered the Commission to report by September 1, 1983 on the success of Commission efforts to obtain changes in hunting practices, which have been widely criticized in Europe as being both inhumane and environmentally unsound. However, the terms of the directive preclude the ban's cancellation without the consent of a majority of EC member states.

The Council of Ministers' decision was welcomed by EC Commissioner for Environment Karl-Heinz Narjes, who said it reflected the will both of the European Parliament and the European public itself, which had overwhelmingly endorsed action to remove the economic incentive behind the annual slaughter of baby seals. Narjes observed that the decision had two advantages in that it both continued voluntary restrictions on pelt imports imposed late last year and left the path open for negotiations with Canada and Norway to reach a final solution on the baby seal issue.

Last December, the Council passed a resolution calling on all EC member states voluntarily to take all measures necessary to halt imports of products made from baby seal pelts. That resolution will remain in effect until the new directive comes into force.

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