

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Working Documents

1981 - 1982

15 February 1982

DOCUMENT 1-984/81

SECOND REPORT

drawn up on behalf of the Committee on the
Environment, Public Health and Consumer
Protection

on Community trade in seal products and in
particular in products deriving from the
whitecoat pups of harp and hooded seals
(*Pagophilus groenlandicus* and *Cystophora
cristata*)

Rapporteur: Mrs J.R.H. MAIJ-WEGGEN

PE 75.783/fin./2

At the European Parliament's plenary sitting of 17 April 1980 Mr JOHNSON and others tabled a motion for a resolution (Doc. 1-106/80) on Community trade in seal products and in particular in products deriving from the whitecoat pups of harp and hooded seals (*Pagophilus groenlandicus* and *Cystophora cristata*).

On 19 May 1980 the European Parliament referred this motion for a resolution to the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection as the committee responsible and to the Committee on Agriculture for its opinion.

On 30 May 1980 the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection appointed Mrs MAIJ-WEGGEN rapporteur.

The European Parliament also referred to the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection Petition No. 8/80 on unnecessary seal culling (PE 64.079) and Petition No. 13/81 on the protection of seals in the Wadden Sea (PE 73.613) on 7 July 1980 and 21 July 1981 respectively.

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection decided to consider these Petitions together with the abovementioned motion for a resolution.

The committee considered the draft report at its meetings of 13 May and 9 November 1981 and at the latter meeting unanimously adopted the motion for a resolution and the explanatory statement.

On 21 January 1982, however, at the request of the chairman and the rapporteur, the report was referred back to committee pursuant to Rule 85 of the Rules of Procedure.

At its meeting of 27 January 1982 the committee reconsidered the report and the amendments tabled to it in plenary sitting. It approved the amended motion for a resolution by 13 votes to 1 with one abstention.

The following members took part in the vote: Mr Collins, (chairman); Ms Hooper, vice-chairman; Mrs Weber, vice-chairman; Mrs Maij-Weggen, rapporteur; Mr Alber, Mr Bombard, Mr Ghergo, Mrs Krouwel-Vlam, Mrs Lentz-Cornette, Mr Moreland (deputizing for Miss Brookes), Mr Muntinoh, Mrs Schleicher, Mrs Scrivener, Mr Sherlock and Mrs Squarcialupi.

C O N T E N T S

	Page
A. MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION	5
B. EXPLANATORY STATEMENT	8
1. INTRODUCTION.....	8
2. WHITECOAT OR YOUNG HARP SEALS.....	8
2.1. Biological data.....	8
2.2. Hunting.....	9
2.3. Trade.....	11
2.4. National protection measures.....	12
2.5. International protection measures.....	12
3. BLUEBACK OR YOUNG HOODED SEALS	13
3.1. Biological data.....	13
3.2. Hunting.....	14
3.3. Trade.....	14
3.4. National protection measures.....	15
3.5. International protection measures.....	16
4. OTHER SPECIES OF SEAL: HUNTING, TRADE AND PROTECTION.....	16
4.1. Walrus.....	16
4.2. Common seal.....	16
4.3. Ringed seal.....	17
4.4. Grey seal.....	17
4.5. Bearded seal.....	17
4.6. Monk seal.....	18
5. COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	18
5.1. Hunting of and trade in harp seals and hooded seals.....	18
5.2. Hunting of and trade in various other species of seal.....	20
6. CONCLUSION	22

ANNEXES

- I. Motion for a resolution (Doc. 1-160/80)
- II. Petition No. 8/80
- III. Petition No. 13/81

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection hereby submits to the European Parliament the following motion for a resolution together with explanatory statement:

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

on Community trade in seal products and in particular in products deriving from the whitecoat pups of harp and hooded seals (Pagophilus groenlandicus and Cystophora cristata)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the motion for a resolution tabled by Mr Johnson and others pursuant to Rule 25 of the Rules of Procedure on Community trade in seal products and in particular products deriving from the whitecoat pups of harp and hooded seals (Doc. 1-106/80);
- having regard to Petitions Nos. 8/80 and 13/81 on the protection of seals (PE 64.079 and PE 73.613);
- whereas the annual slaughter of newborn seals, in particular young hooded and harp seals, never fails to arouse deep public outrage;
- whereas experts have established on several occasions that this slaughter is carried out in a barbaric manner which is degrading to both humans and animals;
- whereas there is admittedly uncertainty in scientific circles about the extent of the decline of all seal stocks, which is why conservative figures are given in the explanatory statement, but whereas it can be stated that all species are definitely endangered to a certain extent, whether this concerns the species as a whole or one or more individual colonies,
- whereas certain species of seal, in particular the monk seal, are now at the point of extinction,
- whereas these adverse effects are caused not by the traditional hunting practices of the indigenous population in the Arctic regions but chiefly by commercial sealing by a number of industrialized countries,
- whereas the Greenlanders have never hunted newborn seals, but only beaters or adult animals,
- whereas in addition to sealing, pollution of the marine environment plays an important role in endangering seals and many other sea creatures,
- whereas in the processed state seal skins and seal products give little or no indication as to the species of seal from which they were derived, with the result that a selective trade ban is extremely difficult to administer,
- whereas, in view of the above, supervision of the trade in skins and products derived from all species of seal is desirable, while in some cases a trade ban is called for,

- having regard to the second report of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection (Doc. 1-984/81).
1. Requests the Commission, following the example of the United States, the Netherlands and Italy and taking into account the action of retail traders in France, to introduce, by means of a regulation, a ban on Community imports of all skins and products derived from young hooded and harp seals;
 2. Requests the Commission to introduce, by means of this regulation, arrangements governing intra-Community trade in the skins and products derived from young hooded and harp seals which safeguard existing stocks and provide for an exemption in the case of Greenland;
 3. Requests the Commission to take initiatives at the next conference of the contracting parties to bring about the inclusion of all earless seals (Phocidae) in Annex II of the Washington Convention, pursuant to Article II (2) (b) of that Convention, insofar as they do not appear in Annex 1, thus making it possible to supervise to a certain extent the trade in the products of earless seals (Phocidae);
 4. Requests the Commission to bring forward proposals in due time to include all species of seal in Annex C of the Council regulation (currently before the Council for approval) implementing the Washington Convention in the EEC so as to ensure the surveillance of imports and exports;
 5. Requests the Commission to devise special measures for the monk seal, which inhabits the Mediterranean, for example by promoting the establishment of special reserves to prevent the extinction of this species, the numbers of which at present stand at only about 650;
 6. Requests the Commission, forthwith, particularly in the light of the serious danger of the extinction of the remaining Greek monk seals, as a result of the recent threat by Greek fishermen to shoot a number of these animals, to:
 - (a) consult with the Greek government in order to prevent the unnecessary killing of Greek monk seals,
 - (b) ensure that reserves are established as soon as possible in Greece, Italy and France, and thereby to protect the species and guarantee the management of these reserves,
 - (c) provide financial aid for conservation measures, including possible compensation for fishermen who suffer losses caused by monk seals,
 - (d) investigate whether the setting up of a seal 'nursery' offers scope for the conservation of the species, and, if so, to enable such a nursery to be set up;
 7. Requests the Commission to ensure that all the protective measures on endangered species of seal take into account the interests of indigenous populations, in particular in the Arctic regions, by permitting, where necessary, the limited and controlled hunting of or trade in endangered species;

8. Requests the Commission to continue and extend its activities to protect the marine environment in accordance with the ALBERS report (Doc. 1-276/81);
9. Instructs its President to forward this resolution and explanatory statement to the Commission and Council of the European Communities.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENTI. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The annual slaughter of young seals, in particular hooded seals (Cystophora cristata) and harp seals (Phoca pagophilus) never fails to arouse deep public outrage. This outrage has been expressed on numerous occasions in the European Parliament. Written questions on the subject have been tabled inter alios by Mr Della Briotta (January 1975), Mr Waltmans (April 1977), Mr Dondelinger (April 1977), Mr Albers (May and September 1978), Mr Krieg (September 1978), Mr Seefeld (July 1979) and Mrs Dekker (May 1980). In October 1978 Parliament also adopted a resolution tabled by Mr Dalyell and others calling for talks with third countries on restricting the hunting of grey seals.

1.2. This working document relates to a motion for a resolution by Mr Johnson and others on trade in seal products (Doc. 1-106/80). The resolution calls for:

- measures designed to regulate international trade in seal products and to prohibit entry into the Community of:
 - (a) any products coming from seals which have not been humanely killed,
 - (b) any product coming from seal species whose stocks are recognized as being imperilled.
- proposals for a total ban on imports into the Community of products from whitecoat or blueback seals and on all intra-Community trade in such products.
- negotiations with other countries involved in the trade in such products, and in particular with Norway and Canada, with a view to achieving international action.

As Mr Johnson's resolution concentrates mainly on the hunting of and trade in whitecoat and blueback seals these will be considered first; other species will then be discussed.

2. WHITECOAT OR YOUNG HARP SEALS

Young harp seals are referred to as whitecoat seals. They are hunted for their thick white fur, which they lose approximately three weeks after birth.

2.1. Biological data

2.1.1. Harp seals are fairly small. On average males and females reach a length of 1.70 m and weigh 135 kg. Harp seals are distinguished by a silver grey skin and black patches on the flanks and back. They are found in the North Atlantic and in the Barents Sea and White Sea. The best-known

populations occur in the White Sea, around Jan Mayen and in the North-West Atlantic in particular around Iceland, Greenland and off the east coast of Canada.

At the beginning of the century the total population was still an estimated 10 million. Intensive hunting has reduced the numbers to approximately 3 million. The most recent counts suggest between 500,000 and 700,000 harp seals in the Barents Sea and White Sea, 100,000 around Jan Mayen and 1 to 1½ million in the North-West Atlantic.

2.1.2. During the summer harp seals are scattered throughout the northern seas and in the autumn they migrate south, where the pups are born in February and March. The largest concentrations occur in spring in the White Sea, around Jan Mayen and Newfoundland. The new-born seals have almost pure white fur and weigh about 10 kg. The pups remain with the cow about 3 weeks. After 3 weeks the white fur changes to a grey skin with black spots (juveniles are known as beaters). Only after the first year does the young harp seal develop its characteristic markings.

2.2. Hunting

2.2.1. Although harp seals are hunted on a small scale by the local population in the Arctic regions, the bulk of the hunting is practised on a commercial scale by western countries. This takes place in the spring in the White Sea, around Jan Mayen and Newfoundland.

2.2.2. Harp seals have been hunted in the White Sea for hundreds of years, in particular by the Russians and Norwegians. At the beginning of this century catch figures were still very high (about 350,000 a year). However, when the population had diminished the Russians introduced quotas and controls and Norwegian hunters were banned. Since the 1970s the average quota has been about 50,000 a year. In 1977 the Russian catch was about 35,000 and the Norwegian about 15,000. The bulk of the catch was whitecoats (circa 70%) and the remainder beaters. To all intents and purposes the slaughter of adult animals is prohibited. As the numbers in this area have risen in recent years the catch quotas for 1981 have been increased to about 60,000 (17,500 for Norway and 42,500 for Russia).

2.2.3. The hunting of harp seals around Jan Mayen dates from the 18th century. Initially various northern European countries were involved, but since the end of the 19th century the Norwegians have had a monopoly. The highest catch figures date from the last century (120,000 a year). However when the numbers declined after the beginning of the 20th century, the catches also fell (to 20,000 - 40,000 a year).

In 1958 a watchdog committee was set up and this has fixed annual quotas since 1971. Since 1971 the average catch has been roughly 15,000 a year, consisting of about 60% whitecoats, 30% beaters and 10% adult animals. As the population has grown, the quota has also been increased in recent years. For 1981 it stands at about 25,000, with 21,000 for Norway and 4,000 for Russia.

2.2.4. In the North-West Atlantic harp seals have also been hunted for centuries, in particular by the indigenous inhabitants of Canada. Catch figures were very high in previous centuries (up to 687,000 in 1831). Since the beginning of this century sealing has been dominated by the Norwegians. Although most hunters hold Canadian nationality the largest sealing companies are under Norwegian management. The Russians entered the north-western hunting areas twice (in 1961 and in 1963) but did not return thereafter.

2.2.5. After the numbers had fallen in the '50s and '60s, hunting was placed under the supervision of the International Commission on North-West Atlantic Fisheries in 1967. The first quota was 245,000 (in 1971). Since then quotas and catches in this area have been as follows:

1971	245,000	321,000
1972	150,000	130,000
1973	150,000	124,000
1974	150,000	147,000
1975	150,000	174,000
1976	127,000	165,000
1977	170,000	155,000
1978	180,000	161,000
1979	180,000	156,000

The quota for 1981 is 180,000, with 157,500 for Canadian hunters and 22,500 for Norwegian hunters. On average 80% of the catch consists of whitecoats and 20% beaters and adult animals.

2.2.6. The local Inuit population of the Canadian islands and Greenland have traditionally hunted harp seals on a small scale. The catch figures for Canadian Eskimos are about 2,000 a year and for Greenlanders about 5 to 6,000 a year. The catch is primarily intended for domestic consumption but a small percentage is also exported. About one-third of the Greenland catch goes via the Royal Greenland Trade Department to Denmark. The Eskimos do not generally hunt whitecoats, concentrating instead on beaters and adult animals.

2.3. Trade

2.3.1. Nearly all of the Norwegian catch from all three hunting areas goes to Norway. Of this three-quarters is processed in Norway whilst about one quarter transits unprocessed to Community countries: West Germany, France, Denmark and the United Kingdom. There is also some transit trade to Sweden. The bulk of the skins processed in Norway are exported to about 23 countries. The major customers are the following Community Member States: West Germany, France, Denmark, Italy and the United Kingdom (about 77%). Exports to Finland, the USSR, Spain, Austria and Canada are also considerable.

2.3.2. The Canadian catch is processed partly in Canada and partly in Norway. About 10% of the processed skins are kept for the Canadian market. The remainder are exported to 12 countries, including, within the Community, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Luxembourg and West Germany. Norway and Finland are also major importers from Canada.

2.3.3. The bulk of the Russian catch is processed and marketed in the USSR. There is no information on Russian exports.

2.3.4. About 2,000 skins from the Greenland catch are exported. These are exported to Denmark. They are then exported from Denmark to West Germany and Italy (in the Community) and to Norway, Sweden, Poland and Austria.

2.3.5. It is very difficult to monitor trade beyond the initial export stage. London is generally regarded as the European fur trade centre but in the United Kingdom itself trade in harp seal skins is limited. However West Germany is the largest, importing, processing and marketing country. Finland too comes high up the statistics.

It is also significant that in spite of legal import restrictions (since 1978) Italy is still listed as an importing and processing country. France which has 'voluntary import restrictions' also appears frequently in trade statistics. The Netherlands, where the fur trade has been characterized by a voluntary boycott for some years and there has been an official import ban since 1980, is the only Community country that no longer features in the trade statistics for harp seals.

2.3.6. The skins of whitecoat harp seals are used mainly for fur boots (approximately 50%) coats, caps and for luxury furnishings including bar stools. They are also used for small accessories, for example purses, bags, brooches etc. By-products such as oil and meat are mainly used by the population in the hunting areas and are seldom exported.

2.4. National protection measures

2.4.1. In 1961 Canada introduced a closed season for hunting. In 1964 the Seal Protection Regulations, designed to introduce more humane hunting methods, were introduced.

In 1965 legislation was passed to provide extra protection for adult females in breeding and nursery areas.

Since 1965 Norwegian ships have been banned from the Gulf of St. Lawrence and, in response to public pressure, the Commission on Seals and Sealing was set up to advise the Canadian Government on seal hunting and trade in seals.

All ships over 65 feet have been banned from the Gulf of St. Lawrence in the spring since 1972.

Since 1977 there have been national quotas for Canadian hunters.

2.4.2. In 1951 Norway introduced control, on hunting around Jan Mayen, fixing dates for the beginning and the end of the hunting season and for the departure of ships.

Since 1954 Norwegian ships have only been permitted to make one voyage a season to the hunting grounds.

Since 1969 a special permit has been required for ships and crews hunting harp seals. Since 1977 national quotas have been operative for catches in international waters.

2.4.3. In 1963 the USSR introduced a national quota of 60,000 a year for hunting from ships in the White Sea and prohibited the slaughter of pregnant and nursing cows. In 1965 hunting from ships in the White Sea was prohibited and a quota of 20,000 a year was introduced for the local Inuit population. Since 1978 a quota of 20,000 to 30,000 a year has applied to commercial hunting

2.5. International protection measures

2.5.1. North-West Atlantic

Since 1967 the International Commission for North West Atlantic Fisheries¹ has been responsible for supervising sealing in this area. In 1967 a ban was imposed on the slaughter of adult females in breeding and nursery areas. Since 1971 an annual quota has been imposed on commercial sealing. It has been illegal to shoot harp seals at sea since 1976. A quota was also imposed in 1977 on the local Inuit population's traditional hunting operations.

¹This has since been superseded by the North West Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO)

2.5.2. Waters around Jan Mayen

In 1958 the Sealing Commission for the North East Atlantic was set up and a hunting and catch agreement concluded between Norway and the USSR. Adult females in breeding and nursery areas have enjoyed special protection since 1967. Since 1971 all adult harp seals have been protected and catch quotas have been introduced for young harp seals. The protective measures for adult seals were abolished again in 1974. As numbers of harp seals were increasing the quota was slightly increased in 1976.

2.5.3. White Sea

Norwegians were prohibited from hunting in the White Sea in 1946. However they have been able to hunt in these waters since the 1960s provided they remain in the northern sector. There are catch quotas for both Russia and Norway on the basis of bilateral agreements.

3. BLUEBACK OR YOUNG HOODED SEALS

Young hooded seals are referred to as bluebacks. They are hunted for their attractive skins, which are white with a silver grey sheen on the back (bluebacks).

3.1. Biological data

3.1.1. Hooded seals are relatively large seals with males reaching a length of 2.5 to 3 m and weighing approximately 400 kg. Females reach a length of about 2 m and weigh about 350 kg. The skin of these seals is blue-grey with black spots. Hooded seals are so named because of the distinctive folds of skin on their heads. The two largest colonies of hooded seals are found around Newfoundland and Jan Mayen. Recently a new colony was discovered in the Davis Strait. Hooded seals occasionally occur off the coasts of Iceland, Ireland, the United Kingdom and Norway.

3.1.2. The total population of hooded seals is estimated at 300,000 to 500,000. Of these about 100,000 are to be found in the neighbourhood of Newfoundland, about 250,000 around Jan Mayen and about 50,000 in the Davis Strait.

3.1.3. During the summer hooded seals are scattered throughout Arctic waters. In October, with the onset of winter, they are concentrated in large groups around New Foundland and Jan Mayen where the young are born at the end of March. The young pups stay with the cows for 5 to 10 days and are suckled. The cows are extremely vigilant during this period. Although hooded seals may live for about 30 years, the average life span in the last decade has been about 8 years for females and about 9 years for males. This trend has aroused concern.

3.2. Hunting

3.2.1. Hunting for hooded seals is mainly carried out on a commercial basis, and takes place in the spring off the Newfoundland coast and around Jan Mayen.

3.2.2. Hooded seals were being hunted off Newfoundland in the last century, both adult animals and pups being taken. Catch figures of 30,000 to 60,000 are quoted for this period. Between 1920 and 1950 the catch fell to a few thousand animals per year but increased after 1950 to about 30,000 a year. Statistics for 1969 to 1973 indicate that 25-50% of the catches were adult animals and the remainder were pups. Up to 1950 sealing was chiefly in the hands of Canadian hunters. After this time Norwegian hunters played an increasingly important role. Because of the aggressive hunting methods the hooded seal population slumped quickly and the International Committee on North West Atlantic Fisheries¹ imposed catch quotas in 1974 varying from 10,000 to 15,000 a year. Recent catch figures are 15,611 (1975), 12,385 (1976), 12,113 (1977), 10,712 (1978) and 14,945 (1979). For spring 1981 there is a quota of 15,000 (6,000 for Norway, 6,000 for Canada and the remaining 3,000 for the first group to fill its quota of 6,000.

3.2.3. The hunting of hooded seals around Jan Mayen also dates from the last century. In the past various European countries have been active in this area. There is little information on catch figures. Since 1920 Norway had had a monopoly but this was threatened after 1950 by the USSR. In 1958 an agreement was concluded between the two countries with provisions on catches. Between 1946 and 1971 the Norwegian/ Russian catch figures averaged 80,000 a year. 70% of the catches consisted of bluebacks and 30% of adult animals. Because of the reduction in the total hooded seal population a quota of about 30,000 a year was introduced in 1971. Recent official catch figures are 27,195 (1975), 17,900 (1976) and 15,000 (1977). For spring 1981 there is a quota of 20,000, with 16,700 for Norway and 3,300 for Russia.

3.2.4. Lastly hooded seals are also traditionally hunted on a small scale on the south and west coasts of Greenland. 2,000 to 3,000 of this species are caught each year. However Greenlanders hardly ever hunt pups, they tend to concentrate instead on animals over 1 year old.

3.3. Trade

3.3.1. Trade in hooded seal skin products originates chiefly in Canada and Norway. There are limited exports from Denmark.

¹ Now NAFO

3.3.2. Approximately 10% of all seals caught in Canada are hooded seals. 90% of these hooded seal skins are exported to Norway and to the following Community countries: West Germany, the United Kingdom, Belgium and Luxembourg. Finland is also a major importer.

75% of the Norwegian catch is processed in Norway and then exported to 23 countries including the following Community countries: West Germany, France, Denmark, the United Kingdom and Italy. Processed skins are also exported to the USSR, Spain, Austria and Canada. Unprocessed skins are exported by Norway to West Germany, Denmark and France in the Community, and also to Sweden and Finland. A total of about 30,000 hooded seal skins are traded via Norway.

3.3.3. Each year Greenland and Denmark dispose of about 1,400 hooded seal skins, the majority of which are processed in Denmark. Although most of these are sold in Denmark, itself, there is a small export trade to West Germany, Sweden, Norway, Poland and Austria. Little is known about trade in and through the USSR.

3.3.4. West Germany is the second most important country after Norway as regards trade in hooded seals. However other Community countries import these skins including France, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Luxembourg, Denmark and Italy. Ireland and Greece hardly appear in the trade statistics and there is an import ban in the Netherlands.

3.3.5. Hooded seal skins are used for the same products as harp seal skins. The by-products are less important.

3.4. National protection measures

3.4.1. Since the 1960s Canada has adopted various protection measures for hooded seals. The Seal Protection Regulations were introduced in 1964, bringing hunting under national control. A hunting ban was imposed in the Gulf of St. Lawrence in 1965 (in spite of which approximately 400 hooded seals were caught in that year).

In response to public pressure the Committee on Seals and Sealing was set up in 1971 to advise the government on sealing. In 1976 shooting seals at sea was prohibited.

3.4.2. In 1951 Norway introduced strict dates for the beginning and end of the hunting season for hooded seals. Since 1954 ships have only been permitted to make one voyage per season and from 1969 ships and crew have required a special permit for hunting.

3.5. International protection measures

3.5.1. In 1967 hooded seal hunting in Newfoundland was placed under the management and control of the International Committee on North West Atlantic Fisheries.¹ In 1968 Canada and Norway introduced common dates for the beginning and end of the hunting season. In 1974 this season was shortened by changing the opening date. Since 1976 it has been forbidden to shoot hooded seals at sea.

In 1977 percentage limits (10% of the pups to be killed) were placed on the slaughter of cows when hunting bluebacks. In 1978 the percentage of cows to be killed was limited to 7½% of the total blueback catch and in 1979 to 5%.

3.5.2. Jan Mayen: In 1958 the Sealing Commission for the North East Atlantic was set up and a Norwegian-Russian agreement signed banning the slaughter of hooded seals in the summer. In 1967 the slaughter of cows when hunting bluebacks was prohibited (except in self-defence). However this provision is largely ignored. On average dead cows account for about 23% of the catch. The first quota (30,000) was introduced for the area around Jan Mayen in 1971. The 1981 quota is 20,000.

3.5.3. Davis Strait: The ICNAF has recommended that hooded seals should not be hunted in these waters. Up to 1975 ships were banned from the colony. However since 1976 there has been no systematic protection. Hunting is infrequent because of natural protection.

4. OTHER SPECIES OF SEAL: HUNTING, TRADE AND PROTECTION

As Mr Johnson's resolution refers to trade in seal products in general it is relevant to provide some information on the hunting of, trade in, and protection of other species of seal, which include the walrus, the common seal, the ringed seal, the grey seal, the bearded seal and the monk seal.

4.1. The walrus (odobenus rosmarus) occurs in the Atlantic Ocean, the Pacific Ocean and in polar waters. The total numbers are estimated at 127,000 to 128,000. The walrus is hunted almost solely by the Inuit in the northern parts of Alaska, Canada, Greenland and Siberia. In all these countries hunting is controlled and subject to quotas.

4.2. The common seal (Phoca vitulina) occurs in virtually all coastal areas of north-west Europe (Iceland, Ireland, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Norway and Sweden). Total numbers are estimated at 69,000 to 76,000. The common seal is hunted in Iceland, the United Kingdom and Norway. There are no restrictions on hunting in Iceland and only partial protection is provided in the United Kingdom. Hunting is banned completely in southern coastal areas of Norway and partially banned in northern coastal areas.

¹Now NAFO

All other countries have imposed bans on hunting and introduced protection measures. Iceland exports 5,000 to 6,000 skins annually, mainly to West Germany.

4.3. The ringed seal (Phoca hispida) occurs particularly in Arctic areas (Greenland, Spitsbergen, Novaya Zemlya, the White Sea and Alaska) and in the Baltic. Numbers are estimated at between 2 and 5 million. The ringed seal is hunted by the Eskimos in northern areas. Although there are no precise figures, the catch is estimated at 50,000 in Canada, 25,000 in Alaska, 50,000 in Greenland, 50,000 in North-East Siberia, 200 to 400 in the Baltic and about 300 in the Gulf of Riga. Trade statistics only exist for Greenland. About two-thirds of the Greenland catch is sent for processing and export to Denmark. Skins transit through and are marketed in the Community - West Germany and Italy - and Sweden, Norway, Poland and Austria. Limited protection exists for this species, in particular in areas where the population is small (Sweden, Finland).

4.4. The grey seal (Halichoerus grypus) occurs in three large groups - off the coast of North-West Europe (around Scotland), off the Canadian coast and in the Baltic. Total numbers are estimated at 115,000 to 117,000. There is a complete or partial ban on hunting in most West European countries with the exception of Iceland, where there is no restriction on hunting.

In the United Kingdom hunting has been banned between 1 September and 31 December since 1970. In the Scottish islands about 500 seals are traditionally killed each year. In 1978, after fishermen in Scotland had complained about a decline in fishing catches attributed to increasing numbers of grey seals off the coast, the Secretary of State for Scotland decided to authorize the shooting of 4,000 newborn seals and 900 adult females. Norwegian hunters were brought in for the job. After numerous protests, including some from the Scottish population, the hunt was called off. A study has now shown that the low fishing catches were the result of over-fishing by humans rather than a high grey seal population.

4.5. Bearded seals (Erignatus barbatus) are distributed throughout the northern waters. Because of this wide distribution, estimates of total numbers vary considerably, ranging from 75,000 to 500,000. The bearded seal is hunted traditionally by the Eskimos in Siberia, Alaska, Canada, Greenland and Norway (Lapland). The meat, which is of a high quality, is eaten and the skin used for boots, harpoon lines, coats and kayak coverings.

Catch figures are estimated at about 1,000 a year for Greenland, 1,600 for Norway, up to 20,000 for Siberia and about 10,000 for Alaska. No figures are available for Canada. The bearded seal is not protected, except in the USA (no restrictions apply in the case of Alaska). The problem in hunting bearded seals is the high degree of wastage. As these seals are mainly hunted at sea, many wounded animals dive and die without being taken.

4.6. The monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) is one of the few species of seal to inhabit warmer waters. The largest concentrations are found in the Mediterranean, in particular round the Greek islands, off the Turkish Coast and in the Black Sea. This seal also occurs occasionally around Corsica and Sardinia and off the coast of Algeria and Libya.

Monk seals have also been sighted off the coast of Morocco and Mauritania around the Canary and Cape Verde Islands and off the Azores. Such seals were probably once fairly numerous but overhunting and environmental pollution have caused the numbers to fall to about 650. Most countries, except for Mauritania, Morocco and Algeria, have banned hunting and adopted protection measures. However in some countries, including Italy and Greece, the protective legislation is not yet enforced.

5. COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It will be clear from the above that all species of seal enjoy some measure of protection. The ringed seal and bearded seal are among the least protected. The walrus, the common seal, the grey seal and monk seal seem to have most protection. The harp seal and hooded seal are in a special position because of the high commercial value of the pups.

5.1. Hunting of and trade in harp seals and hooded seals

The hunting of harp seals and hooded seals is severely criticized because of the threat to the species and the barbaric hunting methods.

5.1.1. Threat to the species

At the beginning of this century the total numbers of harp seals still stood at an estimated 10 million. Intensive commercial hunting has reduced this figure to about 3 million. Under pressure from animal protection organizations a number of measures have been adopted to prevent further decimation:

- a ban on shooting at sea,
- a restriction or ban on shooting adult seals,
- catch quotas for young seals,
- fixed and restricted hunting seasons,
- special permits for ships and crews etc.

The measures vary. Some are national, some bilateral and others international. However, agreements are frequently violated because there is no effective supervision. In spite of this the number of harp seals appears to have increased in recent years.

The position of the hooded seal is more difficult. The total population is now estimated at between 300,000 and 500,000. However there are indications that formerly the numbers were considerably higher. There are a series of protection measures for hooded seals, comparable with those for harp seals. However the total number of hooded seals still seems to be falling so that there is increasing pressure for a ban on hunting, in particular on a commercial scale.

5.1.2. Barbaric hunting methods

The opposition to hunting harp seals and hooded seals stems not only from a desire to preserve the species but also from objections to the barbaric hunting methods employed. Because sealing was confined mainly to inhospitable parts of the world scant information was available on how it was carried out. After Canadian television had reported on sealing at the beginning of the 1960s there was a wave of protest from the Canadian people. The report showed that new born seals were beaten about the head with clubs and the defenceless animals, which were often still alive, were then skinned immediately. When the cows attempted to defend their young they were kept at bay with the same club or killed with the spike on the reverse of the club.

At the request of the Canadian Government a delegation from the Canadian New Brunswick Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was invited to observe the hunt in 1964. The findings of this group were so repulsive that it advised the Canadian Government to ban this barbaric slaughter completely. The Canadian Government did not take this up but did introduce regulations on more humane hunting methods.

In 1965 the Canadian New Brunswick Society then set up the SOS Fund (Save our Seals) and sent, among others, the veterinary pathologist Dr. Elisabeth Simpson to the hunting grounds to observe whether the situation had improved. Her findings were as bad as those of earlier delegations. She found that the majority of young seals were still being skinned alive.

The protest against the slaughter of young seals found increasing sympathy throughout the world and in 1969 the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) was established with branches in numerous countries. Some measure of success was achieved. From 1970 onwards quotas were introduced and other protective measures adopted. However the desired ban on hunting was not forthcoming.

In 1972 an important victory was gained when the United States announced an import ban, on the basis of the 'Mammals Law', on all products deriving from Canadian harp seals and hooded seals. However, more of the Canadian catch was then exported to Europe, where trade increased.

In 1976 the World Congress of the World Wildlife Fund also urged a ban on sealing and put pressure on Canada and Norway to stop hunting.

In 1976 the Green Peace organization also began to take an active interest in the protection of seals. This movement tended towards sensationalism, favouring such activities as blockading sealing vessels and painting young pups, thus rendering the fur worthless.

In 1977 the Council of Europe joined in the protest, and this resulted in discussions on import bans in various European countries. France is now considering a voluntary limitation of imports by the fur trade and legal import bans were introduced in Italy and the Netherlands in 1978 and 1979 respectively. According to the trade statistics only the Netherlands legislation is functioning effectively.

Recent investigations have shown that in spite of all regulations a number of young seals are still skinned alive. This conclusion was reached by Professor E.M. Lang, director of the Basle Zoo (1977) and Dr. Bill Jordan, veterinary pathologist and advisor to the British Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (1978). The catch figures also indicate that the number of cows killed is much greater than is officially admitted. Humane and disciplined hunting is apparently not feasible.

5.2. Hunting of and trade in various other species of seal

5.2.1. As will be apparent from Section 4 above, all other species of seal are protected to a greater or less degree. The main problem lies however in the fact that the protection of the various species of seal is geared more to regional and national considerations than to the species as a whole, i.e. to the situation at international level.

5.2.2. This means for example that the common seal, the total population of which is now fairly small (69,000 - 76,000) is still hunted in some areas where it is relatively common, whilst in other areas protection is total. This applies also to the grey seal (total population 115,000 - 117,000). The monk seal, which is virtually extinct (total population about 650), is no longer hunted but is not under total protection.

5.2.3. Bearded seals and walruses come into a special category. The walrus, numbers of which still amount to about 127,000 to 128,000, is under threat. However the Inuit inhabitants of northern areas are dependent on this animal, which means that limited and controlled hunting is permitted. The same applies to the bearded seal, the total numbers of which are not really known (75,000 - 500,000). The only seal which has no need of protection at present is the ringed seal with an estimated population of 2-5 million.

5.2.4. Because in some areas the local population is heavily dependent on seals absolute protection would not always appear to be appropriate. Local hunting for domestic consumption or for a limited but essential trade is not the main reason for the threat to seal species. The real danger comes from commercial hunting for export to other countries including Community Member States. Another contributory factor is the pollution of the seas in which seals live. In particular the monk seal, the common seal and the grey seal suffer considerably from this.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1. In view of the threat to the species and the barbaric hunting methods employed a Community import ban on the skins of both hooded seals and harp seals, as requested in Mr Johnson's resolution, seems appropriate. Such a Community policy could reduce the hunting of and trade in the skins and products derived from baby seals by approximately 75%.

6.2. In view of the threat to the hooded seal, walrus, common seal, grey seal and bearded seal species, a recommendation should be made that these species be included in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna, or the Washington Convention. The European Community could take the initiative on this matter at the next meeting of the contracting parties. Preparatory talks should commence as soon as possible.

6.3. In view of the very serious situation of the monk seal (which it already included in the Washington Convention) protective measures alone are inadequate. If this species, of which only about 650 remain, is to survive then active measures are required. A number of nature reserves could be established where this seal could be provided for, protected and perhaps even bred for some decades. Such reserves could be created for example in Italy and Greece. Costs could be covered partly by organizing tourist and educational activities relating to these reserves.

6.4. The only seals which do not necessarily require protection for the time being are the ringed seal and the harp seal (with the exception of the latter's pups).

6.5. All protective measures both for harp and hooded seals and the other species should include derogations for the local populations in northern regions. As these people, in particular the Inuit population, are heavily dependent on seal skins and other seal products, limited and controlled hunting must be permitted which, for example, is already the case with walruses. Restrictive measures should apply chiefly to commercial sealing.

6.6. Lastly, it should be noted that apart from commercial sealing the pollution of the sea is the greatest threat to the various species of seal and other sea creatures. The Commission must therefore continue and extend its activities to protect the marine environment as requested in the ALBERS report (Doc. 1-276/81).

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION (Doc. 1-106/80)

tabled by Mr JOHNSON, Mr SIMPSON, Mrs WEBER, Mr PRICE, Mr PRAG,
Mr NEWTON DUNN, Miss ROBERTS, Miss HOOPER, Miss FORSTER, Mr SPICER,
Mr MARSHALL and Mr COLLINS

pursuant to Rule 25 of the Rules of Procedure on Community trade in seal products and in particular in products deriving from the 'whitecoat' pups of harp and hooded seals (*pagophilus groenlandicus* and *cystophora cristata*)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community and in particular to Articles 100 and following relating to the trade and commerce of the Community,
- having regard also to the decisions of the Council establishing the Community programmes of environment and consumer protection,
- considering that large numbers of harp and hooded seals (*pagophilus groenlandicus* and *cystophora cristata*) which inhabit the drifting pack ice of the North Atlantic, from Baffin Bay in the west to the White Sea in the east, are harvested each year,
- considering that all harp and hooded seal products in international trade come from Canada, Norway or Greenland,
- considering that for 1977 the figures are as follows:

Skins taken by	<u>Canada</u>	<u>Norway</u>	<u>Greenland</u>	<u>Total</u>
Harp seals	118,706	56,682	2,804	178,192
Hooded seals	6,063	21,438	3,066	30,567
				<u>208,759</u>

- considering the methods used (e.g. clubbing) in the harvesting of these seals and the fact that substantial numbers of whitecoats (i.e. a harp seal, less than 10 days old which has still not lost the soft white fur it was born with) and bluebacks (i.e. a newborn hooded seal with blue 'fast' fur) are involved,
- considering that the Member States of the Community are major consumers of seal products, such as coats, shoes and bags, mocassins, belts, wallets and novelty items e.g. key cases, purses, seal dolls and cigar cases,

- considering that the trade in seal products is carried out by companies based within the Community and in particular in the U.K., Denmark, France and Germany,

calls upon the Commission

1. To propose measures designed to regulate international trade in seal products and to prohibit entry into the Community of:
 - (a) any products coming from seals which have not been humanely killed
 - (b) any products coming from seal species whose stocks are recognized as being imperilled;
2. To propose a total ban on all imports into the Community of products from 'whitecoat' or 'blueback' seals; and on all intra-Community trade in such products;
3. To negotiate with other countries involved in the trade in such products, in particular with Norway and Canada, with a view to achieving international action along the lines suggested in this resolution.

PETITIONS

pursuant to Rule 48 of the Rules of Procedure

Petition No 8/80

by Mrs Lucy BRIERS and others

Subject: Unnecessary Seal Culling

After receiving the enclosed pamphlet, we are sending this petition to you with 828 signatures of people who disagree with unnecessary seal culling. We are sending this letter and petition now, as in Canada they are starting the season of killing.

We think it is inhuman, actually repulsive and when we think the men do it for extra money when they already have a job, it seems pointless.

People are finding substitutes for goods made from seals. Anybody can do without a seal fur coat when they can get a lined tweed one that is just as warm.

On the back page of the pamphlet there are seal goods. We now have vegetable fat margarine; linings for hats, shoes, gloves are unnecessarily seal fur when they can be fake. Does it matter as long as it is warm. Key rings are unnecessary and so are leather watch straps when you can easily have them made of tough nylon.

We plead with you to take notice of this petition and to try and do something about it.

Luxembourg, 1 April 1980

Mrs Lucy BRIERS
Actress
Nationality: English
6, The Orchard
Bedford Park
LONDON W.4 IJX

There were 828 signatures to this petition.

The documents attached were forwarded to the Committee on the Rules of Procedure and Petitions.

pursuant to Rules 108 to 110 of the Rules of Procedure

Petition No 13/81

by the WERKGROEP ZEEHOND

Subject: Protection of seals in the Wadden Sea

The Werkgroep Zeehond of the National Association for the Preservation of the Wadden Sea and those present at the symposium on Seals in the Wadden Sea on 7 May 1981 in Texel consider that:

- whereas one of the habitats of the common seal is constituted by the tidal flats of the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark;
- whereas the numbers of common seal in the Netherlands tidal flats have fallen since 1950 from some 3,000 to about 500;
- whereas this decline has been caused by persistent hydrochlorides such as PCBs;
- whereas the disruption of the Netherlands tidal flats by shipping, aviation and leisure pursuits has become a threat to the common seal's breeding chances;
- whereas both pollution and disruption threaten the common seal throughout the entire length of the three countries' tidal flats;
- whereas the seal populations of Denmark and Schleswig Holstein, which are still stable and basically unchanged in size, are particularly important as breeding stock for all the tidal flats

immediate international measures must be taken to check any further decline in the common seal population in all the tidal flats

and therefore request the Commission of the European Community
the European Parliament
the Governments of the Netherlands, the Federal
Republic of Germany and Denmark
the Governments of the German federal states of
Lower Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein

to halt the production, use and discharge - in whatever form - of PCBs and other substances which are harmful to seals, to establish sanctuaries along the tidal flats and to maintain the present ban on hunting.

Luxembourg, 9 June 1981

P.I. LAGENDIJK
Coordinator WERKGROEP ZEEHOND
Het Waddenhuis
Voorstraat 18
HAARLINGEN (Netherlands)