



Ban cruel seal trade:

An historic opportunity for MEPs to end EU trade in seal products

The Issue

On 17th February, the AGRI Committee is due to vote on its Opinion on the Commission **proposal for a Regulation to ban the trade in seal products, (COM (2008) 0469)**, for which Veronique Mathieu MEP (EPP-ED/Fr) is the AGRI drafts person.

This proposal is a response to the **2006 EP Written Declaration¹**, calling for an unconditional ban on the trade in seal products, which **a record 425 MEPs signed**. This Declaration reflects the desires of the vast majority of EU citizens who widely support the EU proposed ban on trade in seal products which, if put in place, would help put an end to commercial seal slaughter.

Our position

We are calling on all MEPs to support a ban on trade in seal products with no exemptions for countries where so-called “humane killing” regulations are in place. The standards proposed are woefully inadequate and such regulations cannot be policed in practice. Moreover, the environmental conditions in which the slaughters occur and speed at which the killing must occur, make it impossible for seals to be killed humanely.

Some of the myths relating to the Commission’s proposal

- The proposed Regulation will outlaw the killing of seals in Europe; **FALSE - *it will not as this draft legislation prohibits trading in the products of those kills, but not the small scale hunting of seals in Europe.***
- A Regulation of this nature will not be WTO-compliant; **FALSE - *it is compliant*** and a number of legal opinions testify to this. ***The legal base and legislative provisions are identical to the Regulation on the placing on the market of cat and dog fur products² adopted by IMCO in 2007.***
- The Regulation will impact adversely the lives of Inuit traditional seal hunting practices; **FALSE - *the Commission proposal exempts subsistence Inuit sealing practices.***
- The Regulation seeks to regulate activities from Europe including, for example, the annual Canadian seal slaughter; **FALSE - *it regulates the trade and placing of seal products on the EU market only.***

Important facts you should be aware of

The legislation will help bring an end to annual commercial seal slaughters, of which the Canadian is the world’s largest marine mammal kill. The EU is, for example, a primary market for Canadian seal products. A ban on the commercial trade of seal products will extinguish primary markets for the Canadian, Namibian, Russian and other commercial seal kills.

¹ Written Declaration 0038/2006; attached in Annex

² COM (2006) 684 final of 20th November 2006



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Member State prohibitions on all seal trade are increasing because Europeans have lobbied for decades (and continue to lobby) for an end to the trade in seal products. In 1983, the Parliament and Council prohibited EU trade in the skins of newborn seals. More recently, Belgium, The Netherlands, Slovenia, Germany, France, Italy and Austria have either banned trade in all seal products or announced intentions to so do in the near future. A number of other Member States, including The UK (where 114 cross-party MPs have signed a motion calling for an unconditional prohibition on the trade in seal products in the EU, urging its 78 MEPs to support this approach <http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/EDMDetails.aspx?EDMID=37502&SESSION=899>), Poland, Cyprus and Romania, have established in the Council that they support an unconditional prohibition on the trade in seal products. **Outside of the EU, a number of other countries have prohibited seal product trade, including Croatia, the United States and Mexico.**

Several leading European veterinary experts in humane slaughter methods observed Canada's commercial seal slaughter in 2007. They concluded³ that the Canadian kill, as an example, is inherently inhumane and should be stopped. They reached this conclusion because the physical environment in which the kills take place (gale force winds, freezing rain, moving ice packs, low visibility and high ocean swells) prevent sealers from systematically carrying out a clean stun and kill. In addition, the unique physical characteristics of seals and the speed at which the killing is conducted (largely because of the time limits imposed and the prevailing weather conditions) make the task even harder to accomplish humanely. Clearly, if the killing is inherently cruel and the slaughter cannot be effectively monitored, the only logical way forward is an unconditional prohibition on seal product trade.

Call to action

The vote in AGRI on 17th February is critical; we urge MEPs to reject all of the amendments proposed by your *Rapporteur* which could allow continued trade, via loopholes and exemptions, in the very products the majority of EU citizens want eliminated from the marketplace.

Critically, the Opinion as it stands is vulnerable to a WTO challenge because it is discriminatory in design. It seeks to allow the continued trade in the products of small-scale seals hunts by exempting these from the Regulation and permitting their trade for commercial purposes on a local and regional level.

We urge MEPs on AGRI to adopt a strong draft Opinion and Resolution by supporting amendments that deliver an unconditional prohibition on seal product trade on behalf of the overwhelming majority of Europeans who support this.

In parallel, we call on the 425 MEPs who demanded a ban in the 2006 Written Declaration – and their undecided colleagues – to turn words into action and adopt a final Resolution which puts forward the amendments that will secure an unconditional ban and bring an end to the trade in these products of animal cruelty in the Plenary vote, later in the Spring this year.

13th February 2009

³ Butterworth, A. et al "Welfare Aspects of the Canadian Seal Hunt" 31st August 2007; executive summary attached in Annex