



SEALING and ANIMAL WELFARE

At issue: Animal-rights extremists rely on powerful imagery to help deliver their messages; for sealing they suggest that practices are “inhumane”. No image of an animal losing its life is easy to view, but the presence of blood and postmortem reflexes does not mean that pain and suffering occurs. Anti-sealing campaigns want the public to ignore this scientific opinion. What does this say about their general approach to animal welfare in practice? What do veterinarians and sealers have to say?

Consider these points:

- Employed properly, the hunting methods of Canadian professional sealers are effective and in accordance with established practices of animal welfare, as implied by the Independent Veterinarians’ Working Group (IVWG 2005) and the European Union’s own Food Safety Authority (EFSA 2007).
- The EU commissioned EFSA to review all studies on the animal welfare aspects of seal hunting practices worldwide. Among its conclusions and recommendations based on submitted data, EFSA highlighted the following:
 - Seals *can* be killed to meet established requirements for animal welfare.
 - Animal welfare advocates should pursue the continuous scrutiny of sealing practices, continuing education programs and the pursuance of an “adequate humane standard for killing and skinning” seals.
 - Critical information on sealing from a welfare perspective, in practice, should come from independent monitoring. Non-governmental organizations with extreme biases (see below) *do not qualify* for this task.
- Organizations like the Humane Society International (HSI) and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) criticize commercial sealing in Canada on the basis of sealing practices, but they themselves do not engage sealers or sealers’ organizations on the animal welfare aspects of seal hunting practices. The confusing

suggestion of these groups is, rather, that commercial sealing is “inherently inhumane” – an apparent attempt to convince the public that veterinarian-recommended commercial sealing practices are not effective.

There is not a single peer-reviewed scientific study available to support the claim that commercial sealing is “inherently inhumane.”

IFAW and HIS’s position on sealing seems to be a moral rather than a practical judgment about animal use. Such a position implies that taking any animal’s life is “inhumane”, regardless of the practice used.

Extremist Animal-Rights organizations ideologically oppose ALL uses of animals, from meat to vital medical research. If IFAW and HSI fit this category, then their criticisms of seal hunting must be understood in that context.

- User groups and sealing associations continue to seek the study and advice of independent veterinarians to help determine and promote best practices for sealing under any and all conditions.
- Those who produce goods for market have every incentive to adopt the most stringent and respectful methods of hunting and production, in order to be responsible to valuable consumers *and* to produce the highest-quality products.
- Canadian sealers are committed to ethical hunting and to furthering standards of professionalism. This commitment has led to training programs and sealing workshops in various Canadian provincial jurisdictions, as well as the development of facets of a Universal Declaration on the Ethical Harvest of Seals.

Bottom Line: The best approach to animal welfare in sealing or, for that matter, all forms of wildlife use, should rely on the recommendations of independent veterinary studies, and promoting best practices in all facets of the trade.

For further information visit:
www.sealsandsealing.net

References available upon request.