

# MANAGEMENT AND UTILIZATION OF SEALS IN GREENLAND



**THE GREENLAND HOME RULE  
DEPARTMENT OF FISHERIES, HUNTING & AGRICULTURE  
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## Foreword by Minister of Fisheries, Hunting & Agriculture, Mr. Finn Karlsen:

**Kalaallit Nunaat, Greenland, is on its way to Self-Government in 2009 with a population still dependent on subsistence hunting. It has a population of 56,500 people living in 18 towns and 60 settlements. The area in Greenland is 2,166,086 square kilometres, covering an area from Norway to Sahara and with a coastline of 44,087 kilometres. The population of Inuit is about 90 % of the total population, and maintains a lifestyle connected to the sea and the harsh nature and environment. Greenland faces a paradox created by its traditional image in the world and its need for economic sustainability and development.**



### **Greenlandic sealing**

Hunting seals is a vital component of everyday life and culture in Greenland. It provides a significant amount of nutritious food and income to families living in remote coastal communities. Harp, ringed and hooded seals are the three most important species; they are hunted in every settlement throughout the year as a one man activity from small boats. The skin is used as a part of the national suit and as hunting equipment. The fur is also used as a beautiful part of modern clothing and design.

The hunting of harp, ringed and hooded seals in the Northwest Atlantic is based on sustainable management principles, closely monitored by international organisations such as the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES/NAFO) and the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO). Seals do not belong to endangered species neither under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) or the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). There is no sound biological or any other evidence to justify the introduction of restrictions on trade with seal products from abundant and healthy populations.

### **The proposed EU ban**

A ban on import of sealskin to the European Union or bans on the processing and manufacturing of seal products in member countries has been proposed. Such a ban has no basis in biological evidence and would destroy the fundament of life for many Inuit. It is in direct violation with international trade policy and is counterproductive if EU wishes to continue to be an active and valued partner in the Arctic.

Greenland suffered severely from the 1983 EU-Directive, even with the Inuit exemption. The 1983 sealskin ban by the European Economic Community destroyed the sealskin market and the value of sealskins dropped significantly. Thus, Greenland will not accept further restrictions on trade with sealskins. These restrictions are promoted by extreme animal activist groups and are fuelled by eco-colonialism. It has taken more than two and a half decades to re-establish an economic viable production of sealskins, which then collapsed again in 2008, mostly as a consequence of the EU Ban Initiative. A ban will once more destroy the global market for sealskin and not just certain parts of the

market. Consumers can not see the difference between sealskins provided by Inuit hunters and skins provided by others even if labelling and certification of origin assurance are introduced.

Twenty-three EU member states are members of the IUCN and all have adopted its principles of sustainable use of the world's abundant renewable resources as government policy. In 2004, an overwhelming majority of the government and non-government member organizations adopted a resolution on conservation and sustainable use of seals stating the following:

*“URGES IN PARTICULAR IUCN members to put their sustainable use principles into action by not introducing new legislation that bans the importation and commercialization of seal products stemming from abundant seal populations, provided that obligations and requirements under other international conventions such as CITES are met.”*

The trade ban initiatives in the EU Parliament and Council would create new barriers to trade. Most countries promote trade in order to benefit from liberalisation, not least the European Union. It is thus the policy of the European Union to promote free trade, not only in the World Trade Organisation Doha Development Agenda (WTO-DDA) negotiations, but also in relation to the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries and countries and areas covered by the Overseas Countries and Territories OCT-arrangement, to which Greenland is associated. The idea is to integrate vulnerable economies into international trade in a responsible way, which means that the EU is opening up for trade from developing economies. A further limitation on the import of sealskins or the EU Commission's possible tolerance of member countries breaking international agreements on Technical Barriers to Trade would be a clear breach of the trade policy foundation of the EU. Greenland receives more than 60 % of its budget in block grant from Denmark and is still economically in post-colonial development mode.

According to the rules of the WTO, an import ban on seal products would be a clear violation of international agreements and can not be justified as an exemption of these rules. The ban is also not in accordance with the United Nations (UN) adopted decisions regarding the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to use their natural resources.

A proposed ban, as suggested by the EU, is not justifiable in relation to international law even if the ban included an Inuit exemption. The Greenland Home Rule owned tannery Great Greenland which operates with hunter delivered sealskins has not sold one single skin at the international auction house in Kopenhagen Fur in 2008. If not subsidised by Greenland Home Rule, the hunter families in Greenland will once again be the first victims by the trade ban.

The Inuit of Kalaallit Nunaat would deeply appreciate your understanding and your support to protect our way of life and culture.

Finn Karlsen

Nuuk, January 2009

# Table of content:

1. Introduction .....	1
2. Seals in Greenlandic waters .....	2
3. Historical exploitation of seals in Greenland .....	4
4. Biological advice on seals in Greenland.....	5
Harp seal.....	5
Ringed seal .....	6
Hooded seal .....	6
5. Hunting methods in Greenland waters .....	6
Open water hunting.....	6
Hunting seals with nets.....	7
“Uuttoq” hunting (sneaking).....	8
Hunting from the edge .....	8
6. Current catch levels .....	9
7. The commercial trade of sealskins in Greenland.....	12
8. Regulations on seals in Greenland.....	16
9. International co-operation .....	17
10. Regulations on seals in the EU .....	18
The Written Declaration 0038/2006.....	18
EU Commission proposal of 23 July 2008 to the EU Parliament .....	19
IUCN and abundant seal populations.....	20
Effective and humane killing methods.....	20
11. Sealskin and trade barriers .....	21
12. Conclusions.....	22
“Inuit”, “subsistence” and “traditional hunting” .....	22
Selected References .....	24

# 1. Introduction

Sealing and Greenland are inseparable. Until a couple of decades ago, sealing was the principal occupation in the winter-ice areas. There are still parts of Greenland where sealing is the most important component of peoples livelihood, combined with other forms of hunting. Seal hunting acts also as a supplement to fishing activities and is an economic buffer for families when no other income sources are available. It is also clear that seal meat and other seal products such as organs and blubber are a vital source of proteins and omega-3 acids. So what may not be so obvious for everyone is that consuming seal meat has huge advantages for the protection of the environment and for the health of Inuit in Greenland.

Archaeological investigations and discoveries have shown that the Greenlandic culture always has been based on the harvest of ringed and harp seals in addition to three other seal species. The introduction of fisheries in certain winter-ice areas has not weakened the importance of seal hunting in any significant way, particularly not in remote coastal communities. Yet, for many hunters the main source of income has shifted from sealskin to Greenland halibut for instance, but the importance of the seal as the dominating daily dish remains unchallenged. Seal meat is also indispensable as food for sledge dogs, which power the sledges from which ice-fishing takes place.

Through a traditional way of life for many generations the Inuit have developed an in-depth knowledge of the ecosystems in which they live. As hunters, they occupy the same ecosystems as their prey and accurate observations and interpretations about wildlife behaviour, weather patterns and other environmental factors are essential to survive. Aside from hunting, Inuit have traditionally spent hours observing and discussing the animals, the sea and the land. Lessons were learned and the knowledge base became fine-tuned through direct experience of a subsistence lifestyle. The respect for wild animals led the Inuit to learn how to use and to preserve their wildlife resources for future generations.

In addition to the initiatives in the EU, the Inuit are struggling with the on-going climate changes in the Arctic regions. Weather and ice conditions are changing and attempts are made at both local and national level to adapt to what seems to be severe and lasting changes in the Arctic environment. Hunters are forced to change practice and invest in new equipment. The traditional use of dog sledge is in many areas no



longer possible for several months of the year as the ice conditions have changed profoundly. The behaviour of the ice is completely unpredictable compared to a few years ago.

## 2. Seals in Greenlandic waters

Five different species of seals are found in the waters surrounding Greenland. These are Harp Seal (*Phoca groenlandica*), Ringed Seal (*Phoca hispida*), Hooded Seal (*Cystohora cristata*), Harbour Seal (*Phoca vitulina*) and Bearded Seal (*Erignathus barbatus*). All species have been hunted for centuries, and today, especially the catch of harp seal, ringed seal and hooded seal are of great importance to the Inuit hunters and their families. However, harp seals and ringed seals are without doubt the two most important species in relation to income and food supply. These two species comprise about 96 % of the total catch in 2006.



**Figure 1. Daily scene of newly caught seals and other animals being made ready for sale at the local open air market “Kalaaliaraq” in Nuuk.**

**Harp seals** give birth to their offspring in February-March on dense pack ice concentrations in three regions: in the White Sea in Northern Russia, in the Greenland Sea around Jan Mayen and by New



foundland. After their annual shed, which occurs in about the same areas as where the young are born, harp seals disperse out over the northern Atlantic Ocean. Harp seals from the whelping grounds off Newfoundland arrive in Southwest Greenland in large numbers in May-June and later, during the summer and autumn, and disperse along the coasts northward. In late Autumn, harp seals leave the northern regions and most go back to the breeding sites, some, however, primarily young animals, winter in the waters of the Arctic.

**Figure 2. A group of harp seals with their heads up for breathing and spying “amisut”.**

### **Box 1: Hunting seals – a daily activity**

Income earned from wage occupations in the areas of services, administration, construction and mining, supplements the native domestic economy. However, most Inuit consider themselves to be hunters on either a full-time or part-time basis, balancing casual or seasonal wage employment with hunting. To those Inuit employed full-time as wage earners, weekend and part-time hunting remains an important means of supplementing their food supplies with preferred kinds of meats, and hunting is valued for its contributions to independence, self-esteem and respect from others, traditions, and a healthy lifestyle.

**Ringed seals** are widely distributed in Greenland waters and do not occur in dense concentrations, but are dispersed over large areas. They are hunted year round by various methods, none of which appear to exercise a significant pressure on the population. Ringed seals depend on ice-cover to make dens for hauling-out and pupping. They are able to maintain open holes in fast ice up to 2.6 m thick. Especially in Northwest and East Greenland, ringed seals are very abundant due to their preferred habitat in areas with dense ice conditions. This also makes them a preferred prey to polar bears.



**Figure 3. A ringed seal on an ice floe.**

**Hooded seals** give birth to their offspring at the end of March on pack-ice concentrations in three regions: in the Greenland Sea around Jan Mayen, in the middle of the Davis Strait and by Newfoundland. Hooded seals from the latter two breeding sites migrate to West Greenland and Southeast Greenland and the Denmark Strait. In mid-summer, from the middle of June to the end of July, hooded seals gather on pack ice to complete their annual shed. There are two known shedding sites: one north of Jan Mayen and one in the Denmark Strait. Hooded seals from Jan Mayen usually remain east of Greenland and existing data suggest that the hooded seals caught in Greenland almost exclusively originate from Newfoundland and the Davis Strait, and not from the Jan Mayen population.

#### **Box 2: Abundant seal populations**

**Harp seal:** ICES/NAFO working group on harp and hooded seals estimates the current population in the Northwest Atlantic to be 5.8 million seals. It has been stable since 1996 and the sustainable harvest yield is recommended to 554,000 harp seals per year for Greenland and Canada. In addition, as long as the population observed constitutes at least 70 % of the maximum population size (70 % of 5.8 million harp seals), the sealing is biologically sustainable. In 2006, Greenland caught about 96,000 harp seals while Canada caught about 355,000 harp seals.

**Ringed seal:** In the Baffin Bay area where most of the ringed seals in Greenland are caught, the estimated population size is 1.2 million ringed seals. For decades, harvest levels have been stable – indicating a sustainable harvest of the population. In 2006, Greenland caught about 86,000 ringed seals and the population is not considered endangered.

**Hooded seal:** ICES/NAFO working group on harp and hooded seals estimates the current population in the Northwest Atlantic to be 600,000 seals and the potential biological removal is recommended to 23,085 hooded seals. In 2006, Greenland caught 4,842 hooded seals, while Canada caught 389 hooded seals and the population is not considered endangered.

### 3. Historical exploitation of seals in Greenland

Since the arrival of the first Inuit, seals have provided the basic nutrition for Inuit families living in Greenland, especially during winter when other prey migrate south or to open water areas. In addition to food and nutrients for humans and dogs, seals have provided the Inuit communities with necessities such as clothes, fuel for lighting and heating, dog harnesses, lashes, floats for hunting, and covers for tents and kayaks.



Figure 4. A traditional made “qajaq”.

Inuit were traditionally nomadic, travelling in winter by dog team and in summer by foot, “umiaq” (family boats) and by kayak in search of caribou, seals, whales, fish, and walrus. As a general rule, families dispersed from their larger coastal winter campsites in the spring to hunt seals on the ice. During the ice-free months, they often moved inland to fish at lakes and to hunt caribou. At the beginning of winter, family groups would converge and return to the sea-ice to hunt seals again. This pattern varied from region to region, depending on the seasonal distribution of wildlife.

For the Inuit who have lived and travelled for centuries along the coasts of East and West Greenland, the ringed seal or “natseq” is of profound importance. Without constant supplies of ringed seal products, Inuit cultures would have had far greater difficulties inhabiting the Arctic. Ringed seals can be hunted year-round, even during the dark months, and they have therefore always been the most reliable source of daily necessities for the lives of Inuit in Greenland. Even the means of transportation to hunting grounds has been facilitated through the use of ringed seal products. Skins from ringed seals and bearded seals is used to cover the frames of kayaks, and was also formerly used to cover the “umiaq’s” that were used for transportation of whole families, while seal meat is still essential “fuel” for the dogs that pull the sleds.

#### Box 3: Annual cycle of hunting ringed seals

Several methods are used to catch ringed seals, depending on the season. During the open-water season in summer and autumn, most ringed seals are shot from boats. Netting in open water is most effective in October-November when the seals are unable to see the net due to increasing light intensity and when the sea-ice has not yet formed. During winter, most ringed seals are caught in nets under the fast ice. Some ringed seals are also shot at their breathing holes, quickly followed by the use of a lance, which will ensure a swift kill. In spring when the seals haul out on the ice to bask, they are easy targets for experienced hunters who use screens to sneak up on an appropriate shooting distance. When the ice breaks up, seals are shot along the ice edge or in cracks.



The harvesting of seals and other marine mammals is an integral part of the livelihoods and culture of Inuit communities. In Greenland, dog sleds are widely used for travelling to hunting and fishing grounds. Seals are used extensively for clothing for people who hunt or fish on the sea ice. Throughout the Arctic, seal meat is considered a delicacy and is a fundamental component of the human diet in hunting communities. Sealskins are traded and exported to international markets. Blubber lamps, skin covered tents and “umiaqs” are no longer used, except during cultural events, but skin covered kayaks, seal skin trousers, anoraks and kamiks are still important equipment for hunters and fishermen in Greenland and as part of the national suits thus part of the traditional heritage.



**Figure 5. For cultural events and happenings the female national suit is often worn.**

## 4. Biological advice on seals in Greenland

Obtaining biological knowledge on marine mammals in the Arctic environment is often a difficult, expensive and long-term process since the seals are distributed over vast areas. In addition, extreme weather conditions, remote location, and high expenses to cover logistics and transportation may limit the biological knowledge that can be obtained from a particular population. Thus, lack of data leads to recommendations that often create controversy between the scientific community and the hunters, since the hunters have accumulated traditional ecological knowledge for decades, and therefore often finds it difficult to understand and accept the term “data poor”. Still, many efforts are made to ensure a sustainable utilisation of the marine mammals, which is why Greenland is involved in several institutions and organisations delivering biological knowledge on the current status of our marine mammals. This engagement will be described later on.

### **Harp seal**

Recent research concludes that the population of harp seal is not threatened. Biologically, it is estimated that the current population of harp seal nearly is at its highest level ever. The northwest Atlantic harp seal population, which is the target of the hunt in both Canada and Greenland, is currently estimated to number 5.8 million animals and the sustainable yield of the catch these years is estimated to 554,000 animals (ICES/NAFO 2005). The most recent survey took place in March 2008 with the analyses still on-going. The Canadian authorities have adopted a multi-year management plan specifying that as long as the population observed constitutes at least 70 % of the maximum population size (70 % of 5.8 million harp seals), the sealing is considered to be biologically sustainable. The Canadian total allowable catch (TAC) for 2008 was 275,000 (ICES/NAFO 2008). When the

Canadian authorities recommend the annual catch quotas, the catches in Greenland and Nunavut (territory Canada) are also included, since both countries harvest from the same populations.

### **Ringed seal**

In 1996 a working group established by The North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission's (NAMMCO) Scientific Committee concluded that Greenland's current take of ringed seal was sustainable. Three substantial arguments for this conclusion are that the current hunting pressure has been maintained for a number of years without visible signs of a decline in the population, that Greenland's take is particularly made up of males and very young individuals and that the ringed seal's very wide and even distribution across most of the Arctic limits large-scale overexploitation. Even though ringed seals are widely dispersed and apparently capable of surviving under very severe ice conditions, they are considered vulnerable to sudden changes in ice coverage.

### **Hooded seal**

Regarding the Northwest Atlantic population, it is recommended that the potential biological removal (PBR) currently is 23,025 seals per year. PBR is a highly conservative approach used in marine mammal management where some population parameters are lacking. Greenlandic hunters catch about 6,500 hooded seals per year (1993-2006), and in Canada the TAC is 10,000 seals. However, in recent years only a few hundred hooded seals have been caught in Canada. Consequently, the harvest levels are certainly sustainable.

## **5. Hunting methods in Greenland waters**

Different hunting methods are used according to season, location and ice conditions.

### **Open water hunting**

Hunters in small boats shoot seals found in open water. Mostly the hunting of harp seal for instance is a one man activity. When the hunter reaches an area where he expects to find seals, he stops the engine of his boat or slows down the speed while systematically searching the area. Too high speed involves noise from the engine and will make the hunt more complicated, since it will scare away the seals and make any judgement of their movements difficult. Experience, good eyesight and excellent hunting skills are therefore required to spot a seal and shoot it from a small boat.



**Figure 6. Open water seal hunt from a small boat.**

Thus, hunting of harp seals occurs exclusively from small boats with riffles. After having shot the seal, the hunter will, as fast as possible try to reach the seal before, it sinks. However, there are without doubt seals that sink before they can be hauled up. This is especially true in the pre-summer period in the months of May and June when harp seals are very lean. Consequently, during the first few weeks of the open water hunt, the loss due to sinking is slightly higher than during the remainder of the open water season. Hunters report that this is due to the physical condition of the seals and the lower salinity of the water due to melting ice and snow.



**Figure 7. Successful open water hunt from a small boat.**

#### **Box 4: The problem with struck and lost**

Hunting of harp seals occurs exclusively from small boats with riffles, and there are probably quite a few seals that sink before they can be hauled up. This is especially true in the pre-summer period when harp seals are very lean. Harp seals moult beginning in early April each year, starting from adult males, immature and followed by adult females. During moulting animals fast and lose more than 20 % of their body weight mainly in the form of fat. The shooting of seals at substantial distances is the cause of most hunting loss. The loss rate varies primarily according to seasonal changes in the specific gravity of seals (i.e. their fat content) and the salinity of surface water. In May and June, struck and lost rates for harp seals may be as high as 40 – 50 %, but when the major harvest takes place in the autumn, the amount of harp seals lost is heavily reduced due to an increase in blubber thickness. Locality is also a factor, in that seals shot close to river deltas are more likely to sink because of the relative freshness of the water there.

Ringed seals are fattest and the water most saline in the winter, which means that the animals are much more prone to float at that season than they are during spring and summer.

#### **Hunting seals with nets**

From October to the end of March, netting is the prevailing method since it is impossible to use any other technique during the dark winter months. The use of nets for catching ringed seals seems to have been introduced in Greenland by Europeans a few hundred years ago. In some municipalities, using nets under the ice constitutes about two thirds of the total harvest of ringed seals. Especially in the northern parts of Greenland, where most ringed seals are caught, netting constitutes an important method to catch ringed seal during winter due to the dark periods and ice conditions. Using riffles is not an alternative since it is completely impossible to see the seals in the dark. However, hunting with nets becomes less effective relative to the increase in light during the spring. The success of netting under the ice also depends on the duration and stability of the fast ice cover, the amount of snow, and the frequency of strong wind, all of which influence the possibilities for setting and tending the nets.



**Figure 8 + 9. The hunt of ring seals using seal nets is a specialised way of hunting and requires much skill with its use of the “tooq” and in finding the right location for the net.**

**“Uuttoq” hunting (sneaking)**

In spring, when ringed seals come up through the breathing holes to haul out on the ice to bask, they are easy targets for experienced hunters who use screens to sneak up on an appropriate shooting distance. Hidden behind the canvas, the hunter crawls towards the seal. When he is at close range, he shoots the seal through its head. If the shot misses the head, the seal may manage to disappear down through the breathing hole and it will be lost to the hunter. The method can only be used in the period when there still is a stable ice layer.

**Hunting from the edge**

Another type of hunting in which riffles are used takes place from the edge of the ice in springtime. In this type of hunting the main target are ringed seals. Seals may also be caught through small cracks in the ice, at the edge of the permanent ice or from a drifting ice floe. The hunter will then bring along a kayak or a small boat on his dog sledge.



**Figure 10. Seal hunt from the ice edge.**

## 6. Current catch levels

Being a full time hunter in Greenland is an occupation and lifestyle, which is characterized by great variability, insecurity and unpredictable conditions regarding weather and ice. Perfect weather and ice conditions at the right time of the year can result in high harvest levels regarding harp and ringed seals. On the other hand, stormy weather during autumn may have devastating consequences for households depending on the harvest of harp seals. If the weather does not allow any hunting activities taking place, only few alternative income sources are available in small settlements located in remote coastal areas. In addition, being a hunter is physically hard labour and considered a dangerous occupation in relation to security. Finally, the money earned is not always enough to provide for the wellbeing of a family, why many adult hunters advice their offspring not to engage in hunting. Still, the amount of full time hunters has been stable over the last decade accounting about 2,700 full time hunters, while the number of leisure hunters has stabilised around 7,300.

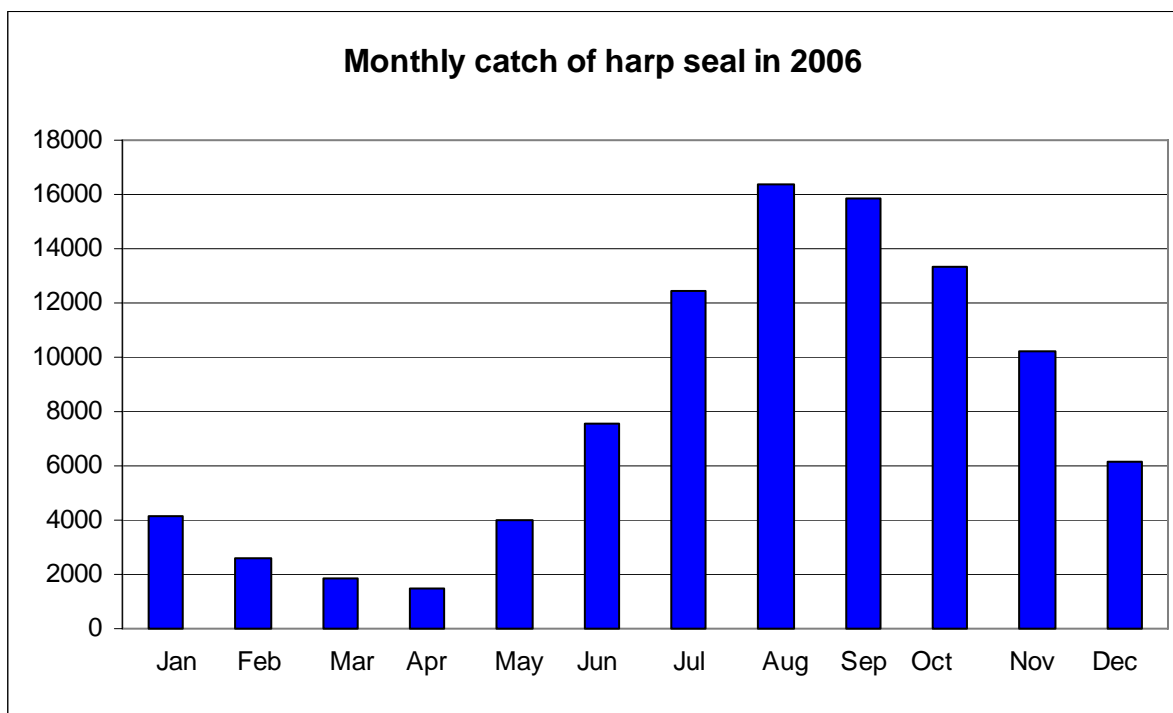
From table 1 below, it is obvious that harp and ringed seals are the most important seals to the hunters in Greenland. These two species account for about 96 % of the total harvest in 2006. Where the catch of ringed seals seems to be quite stable over the years, the amount of harps seals caught is much more fluctuating. Previously, ringed seal was the most important species in relation to food supply and income, without any doubt. However, the demand from the fur industry has now made it more attractive to hunt harp seals since Greenlandic hunters are offered a slightly better price for sealskins from harp seals compared to sealskins from ringed seals, as prizes are fixed while the skins are subsidized by the Greenland Home Rule Government. The increasing numbers of harp seals have also played an important role in the choice of hunting method.

**Table 1. The annual catch of seals in Greenland from 1995-2006.**

	<b>Harp seal</b>	<b>Ringed seal</b>	<b>Hooded seal</b>
<b>1995</b>	63,263	79,160	7,179
<b>1996</b>	74,676	89,939	9,891
<b>1997</b>	69,591	80,207	7,492
<b>1998</b>	82,217	78,748	6,335
<b>1999</b>	95,017	83,345	7,455
<b>2000</b>	99,801	80,302	5,844
<b>2001</b>	86,763	78,437	6,514
<b>2002</b>	67,725	82,504	4,806
<b>2003</b>	67,607	80,646	6,353
<b>2004</b>	72,245	77,429	5,853
<b>2005</b>	93,494	92,063	4,456
<b>2006</b>	95,953	86,274	4,842

The annual harvest of harp seals varies significantly from year to year, especially due to severe fluctuations in ice and weather conditions, but changes in distribution or localized abundance may also have an effect. Harp seals arrive in Southwest Greenland in large numbers in May-June and later

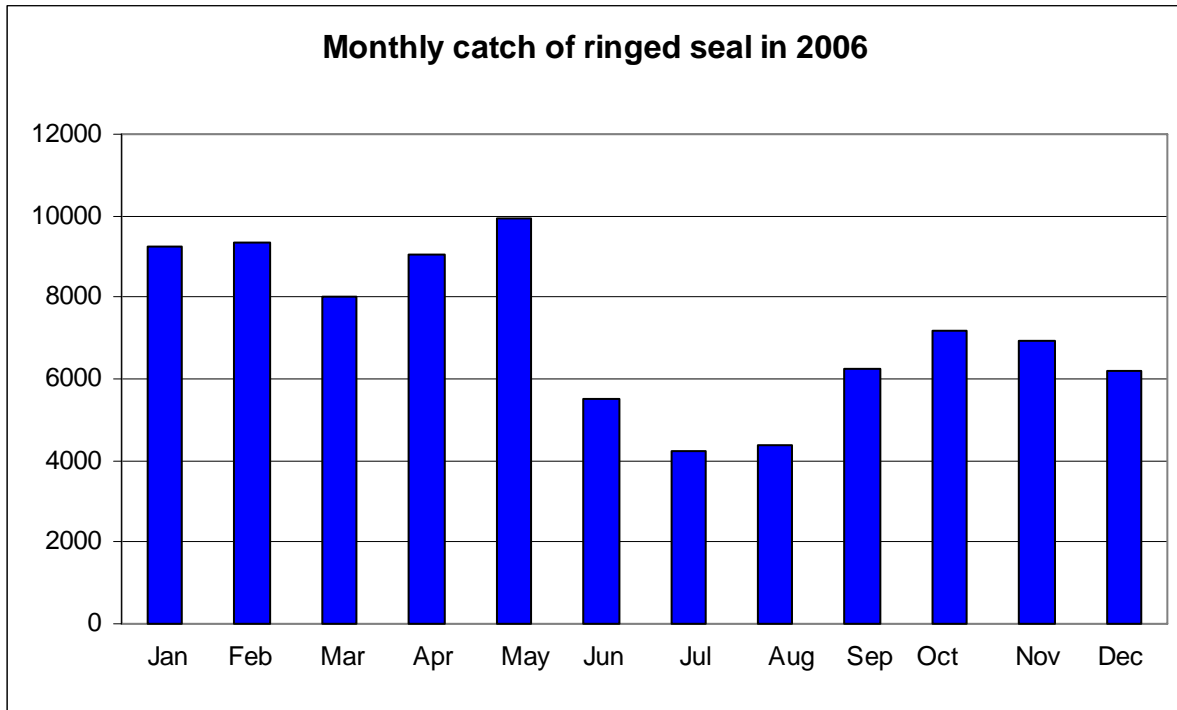
during the summer and autumn, disperse along the coasts northward. In late autumn, harp seals leave the northern regions and most go back to the breeding sites some, however, primarily young animals, winter in the waters of the Arctic. Hunting of harp seals occurs exclusively from small boats with riffles and is in most cases a one man activity. As opposed to ringed seals, which primarily are caught in Northwest and East Greenland, the majority of harp seals are caught along the entire West coast of Greenland.



**Figure 11. The major harvest of harp seals occurs in the months from July to November - a busy time for the sealers on the West coast of Greenland.**

The major harvest of harp seals occurs in July to November, where they have dispersed along the entire West coast of Greenland and to the Southeast as well. During the months of September to November, harp seals have gained a thick layer of blubber why the struck and lost at this time of the year presumably is much lower than during spring and early summer.

Regarding ringed seals, for all regions in Greenland, great inter-annual variability is also found, but not to same extent as the harp seal. The inter-annual variation in the catch of ringed seals is also related to the actual weather and ice conditions. For instance, the weather and ice conditions in late April-June will determine the chances of hunting seals basking on the ice or seals occurring at the ice edge. During summer it is the wind force in particular that determines the hunting success, since hunting is mainly conducted from small boats (i.e. dinghies with outboard engines). Figure 12 shows how the catch of ringed seal varies during the different seasons.



**Figure 12. As opposed to the hunt of harp seals, the hunting of ringed seals is spread more equally throughout the year - providing a steady supply of meat.**

The peak season for the catch of ringed seal varies between regions. For Greenland as a whole, most ringed seals are taken from November to May, which reflects that the peak season in the northern regions (where the major part of the catch is taken) is in winter and spring, while catches are relatively small during the open water season. In the southern regions, however, the great majority of ringed seals are caught between May and August.

In the period from 1993 - 2006, Greenlandic hunters caught in average about 6,500 hooded seals per year of which 99.7 % originate from the Northwest Atlantic populations in The Gulf of St. Lawrence, The Front of New Foundland and the Davis Strait. The remaining 0.3 % of hooded seals caught by Greenlandic hunters is considered to originate from the Greenland Sea population. These seals are caught by hunters in the remote settlement of Ittoqqortoormiit on the Northeast coast of Greenland.

Looking at the catch of ringed seals in the period from 1996 to 2006, leisure time hunters account for 14-20% of the annual catch. Hunting of seals continues to be an important part of everyday life and culture in Greenland. Even though people could afford to buy seal meat at the local open air market "Kalaalaraq", it is almost considered an obligation to be self-sufficient with seal meat. Taking expenses to gas, ammunition and time spend on the hunt into consideration, it may be cheaper to buy the meat at local market, but people prefer hunting the seals on their own and prepare it as they like.

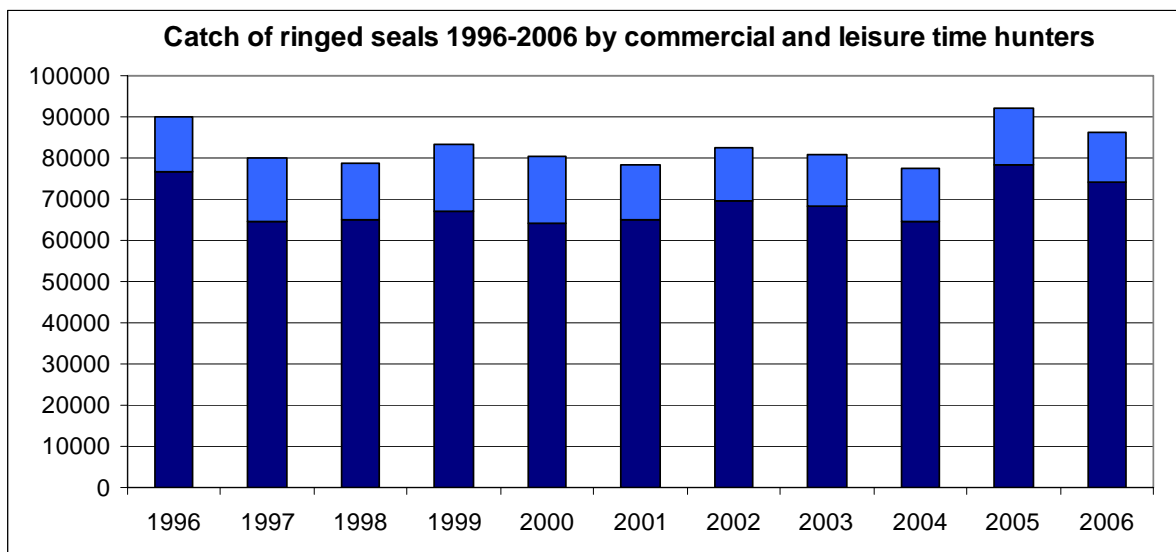


Figure 13. In most years, leisure time hunters account for about 1/5 of the harvest of ringed seals in Greenland, which underpins the cultural and socio-economic importance of hunting seals. Light blue: leisure time hunters, dark blue: commercial hunters.

Table 2. The table shows in percentage the distribution of the hunt of ringed seals by use of nets or riffle and in total per region for the years 1993-2007.

Region	Distribution of catches with nets	Distribution of catches with riffles	Distribution of total catches
North Greenland	68 %	49 %	54 %
Vest Greenland	19 %	26 %	24 %
South Greenland	2 %	9 %	7 %
East Greenland	11 %	17 %	15 %

## 7. The commercial trade of sealskins in Greenland

The harvesting economy has changed a great deal over the past century. Perhaps the most significant change has been the introduction of cash as a necessary resource for the operation of the system. Harvesting is now a mixed economy, with subsistence and monetary elements coexisting. Today, hunting seals is not economically viable without a subsidy. However, harvesting provides the basic food supply for most communities. If harvesting were to decline as the major source of food, traditional food would have to be replaced by expensive imported food; this could actually result in higher levels of subsidies to support the nutritional needs of the people. In addition, we do not know the consequences if local people were to eat more western food, as there is not sufficient studies on this relevant issue.



The majority of sealskins are sold by the hunters to the tannery of Great Greenland A/S (a shareholder company), located in Qaqortoq in South Greenland. The Greenland Home Rule is the owner of the tannery and it is today a modern facility using state of the art technology in the processing of sealskins. For decades, local knowledge on tanning sealskins have been accumulated at the tannery and it is currently one of the worlds leading in producing high quality furs and leather from sealskins. Hides from polar bears, caribou, muskoxen, sheep and arctic winter fox are also processed at the tannery, but only to a minor extent.

Currently, 50 people are employed at the tannery - making it one of the largest companies in South Greenland. In addition, the tannery operates 50 trading stations all over the country, making it possible for hunters in small communities to sell their sealskins. Having 50 trading stations spread all over the country is only possible through the government subsidies paid to the Inuit hunters, which is administrated by the tannery. Since the anti-sealskins campaigns in 1980's, it has been necessary to subsidy the hunters in Greenland since world market prices collapsed as a result of the campaigns.

During the end of 1990s world market prices became more favourable and the tannery was able to offer better prices to the hunters. As a result of the positive development, the Greenland Home Rule intended to reduce the subsidies. Yet, the result of the written declaration 0038/2006 together with recent initiatives in The EU on banning import and export of sealskins quickly showed it-self.



**Figure 14. Sealskins being stretched before tanning.**

During the autumn 2008, the Greenland Home Rule had to give a subsidy of 8 mio. DKKR (1.06 EURO) to Great Greenland due to the crisis in the sealskin industry. It is also expected that the Government will be forced to increase future subsidies again in order to ensure reasonable prices and living conditions for families living in remote coastal communities and to avoid close of a company that employs about 50 persons.



**Figure 15. An employee at the tannery working on the sealskins.**

A new initiative in 2007 led by 70 local hunters opening up a local tannery in North Greenland focusing on the use of the whole seal is now having very big economical problems and the survival of the company is uncertain because of the sealskin crisis, e.g. created due to the EU proposal on ban.

In 2008, 20.5 mio. DKKR were paid directly to the commercial hunters in subsidies – corresponding to about 7,500 DKR / 1,000 EURO to each and every commercial hunter in Greenland. This may sound like an insignificant amount, but it makes it possible for the hunters with this money to invest in new equipment, tools, ammunition, maintenance and so on.

As mentioned earlier, extreme weather fluctuations may prevent the Inuit from hunting in long periods, and as a consequence of the poor weather conditions in the period from 2002 to 2004, the catch decreased and so did the commercial trade of sealskins in Greenland, which was much lower than usual. Due to the low supply from local hunters, the tannery of Great Greenland A/S found it necessary to import raw sealskins from Canada to make best possible use of the capacity at the tannery, and thus also able to continue to offer local Inuit hunters reasonable prices for their sealskins and avoiding laying off local workforce. After the catch returned to the same level it has not been necessary to import further from Canada. This development is summarised in the table below.

**Table 3. Probably due to bad weather conditions and changes in ice conditions, the number of harp seals, ringed seals and hooded seals caught in Greenland decreased from 2001 to 2004. However, in 2005 and 2006 the catch reached almost the same level as in 2000 due to favourable catch conditions.**

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007 (September)
<b>Number of seal caught</b>	188,765	174,144	157,187	157,046	157,697	191,605.	188,939	119,750
<b>Number of seal skins traded</b>	102,646	80,481	61,848	75,309	83,754	118,686	112,000	92,000
<b>Number of seal skins imported</b>	0	0	1,500	51,935	44,100	45,000	0	0

From the table above it is clear that about 80,000 to 95,000 sealskins or about 45-50 % the total harvest is not sold to the tannery, but used for private purposes. This indicates that the seal hunt in Greenland is both subsistence oriented and a commercial activity. Seals are hunted primarily for their meat and skin, but the production of handicrafts, clothes and traditional artefacts are important by-products of the hunt. In addition, a recent questionnaire survey carried out by the Department of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture shows that 34 % of the hunters report struck and lost as an ordinary catch when reporting their annual harvest, which also can explain the difference between the seal catch and the number of sealskins traded. The preliminary results of this questionnaire survey was presented at

a NAMMCO-workshop in November 2006 in Copenhagen focusing on struck and lost in relation to marine mammals. A new NAMMCO-workshop on the issue of best practices in hunting and killing of seals with invited experts is scheduled for February 2009.

Local knowledge accumulated for generations on tanning sealskins, has been used in the processing of both Greenlandic and Canadian sealskins. In this way, Greenland's Inuit hunters profit from the commercial Canadian seal hunt since the tannery has been able to continue its maximum production capacity and thus also able to offer hunters reasonable prices when buying their skins at the trading stations. The commercial trade in Greenland reached almost 119,000 sealskins in 2005, 112,000 in 2006, but has decreased in 2008 to 85,000 skins and an estimated 67,000 skins in 2009.

Over the last few years, Greenland has been able to optimize the trade through education of hunters, traders and a modernization of the tannery, allowing a significant reduction in the government subsidies from 1999 to 2008. The proposed EU ban is ruining an important economy for Greenland - one based on the sustainable use of an abundant renewable resource.

**Table 4. The latest data from Great Greenland A/S demonstrates an enormous decrease in trade. Auctions prices were very good in 2006 but the result of recent EU initiatives has shown to be devastating for the well developed trade.**

Year	Harp seal (numbers)	Ringed seal (numbers)	Other seals (numbers)	Total (numbers)	Yearly price value in EURO.	Yearly price value in DKR.
2004	62,768	18,005	3,946	84,719	4,715,414	35,129,837
2005	41,721	14,265	3,806	59,792	4,236,813	31,564,256
2006	39,627	20,845	1,640	62,112	7,640,381	56,920,839
2007	24,253	18,351	997	43,601	2,403,828	17,908,515

**Table 5. The data illustrates the trade of sealskins in EU is already experiencing a huge reduction, indicating that the proposed ban is already having an effect on the market.**

Year	EU	Outside EU
2004	71 %	29 %
2005	69 %	31 %
2006	66 %	34 %
2007	63 %	37 %
2008, May	34 %	66 %

## 8. Regulations on seals in Greenland

In Greenland, the law on protecting nature and wildlife from 2003 constitutes the overall frame regarding wildlife regulation. From spring 2009 a national regulation regarding the protection of seals and sealing will come into force, this will include a year round protection of harbour seal. At present, hunting of seals is regulated in the wildlife sanctuary in Melville Bay and the national park in Northeast Greenland. In most municipalities, seal hunting is restricted by area, season or method through bylaws. For instance, in several fjords it is prohibited to use snowmobile and even motor boats in order to protect seals and traditional hunting methods. Yet, in most municipalities, seals can be hunted year round by all Greenlandic citizens, provided they have a permit, either a commercial or a leisure time permit. As such, there are no quotas set on any of the five species of seals found in Greenlandic waters, but permits are used to control the harvest. As a hunter, you are bound each year to submit your catch report to the Department of Fisheries, Hunting and Agriculture. This makes it possible to monitor and evaluate the catch levels of the five different species of seals, both at local and national level.



## 9. International co-operation

With a culture and economy based on wildlife harvesting, Greenland's Inuit have the greatest stake in protecting arctic ecosystems. Hundreds of years ago, Inuit environmental and economic strategies were based on Inuit customary law and reflected the nomadic lifestyle that both linked and separated social groups. These regulations stipulated the use and management of many of the natural resources and preserved social and economic order among the Greenlandic Inuit. Today, strategies to sustain the resources upon which the Inuit depend for their survival and their livelihood require the participation of local, regional, national, and even international interests.

In the 1950's and 1960's, there were hardly any international organisations and formalised scientist groups in relation to management of seals. Today, the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea ICES/NAFO working group on harp and hooded seals and the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO), which was established in 1992, have special biological and science task forces which only study and monitor seal populations. Canada and Norway also have well-established seal scientists who collaborate with our biologists in Greenland.

In 1995, the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources was founded in Nuuk, the capital of Greenland, with the primary purpose to provide scientific background data regarding management and exploitation of living resources in Greenland. The institute is an independent research institute under the Greenland Home Rule.

Under the auspices of NAMMCO, a Seal Management Committee has been established 2006 and since chaired by Greenland. The task of the committee is to set out administrative recommendations and organise the seal research and monitoring coordinated in the NAMMCO countries. Canada has a permanent observer-status in NAMMCO and will participate in this work. In addition to the Seal Committee, NAMMCO already hosts a Committee on Hunting Methods with the primary purpose to provide advice on hunting methods for marine mammals relevant to NAMMCO member countries.

For the above-mentioned reasons there are under no circumstances reason to worry that sealing will get out of control. On the contrary, there is a widespread collaboration on research, monitoring as well as experience and knowledge exchange. Animal welfare organisations substantiate their opposition against sealing and in particular sealing of young seals with reference to what happened in the 1950's and 1960's when the seal population is thought to have been reduced to 2/3 of the population in the North Atlantic. Lessons have been learned and this will not happen again.

## 10. Regulations on seals in the EU

Culture consists of unique characteristics, sometimes / often endemic to a certain locality, region or nationality. Culture can be hard to understand. For example, many outside the Arctic region have difficulty understanding and appreciating the great importance in Inuit culture of harvesting local wildlife, whether the harvesting is conducted for cultural reasons, subsistence purposes or to generate the cash income required in the modern economic system. Such a lack of understanding contributed to objections by protest groups regarding the killing of wild animals, especially the use of what were sometimes viewed as inhumane killing techniques.



**Figure 16. Whole skinned seals stored for dog food.**

During the 1970's and 1980's, harp seals and hooded seals were often on the front pages because of an intense debate concerning the commercial harvesting of seal pups at the Canadian whelping patches. Partly because of this debate and the following decreasing demand for sealskins, and partly because of management decisions leading to catch regulations, the commercial catches of these seals decreased dramatically.

The animal rights campaigns of the 1980's had devastating impacts on Inuit communities, which were earning significant amounts of their income from seal hunting at the time. The 1982 sealskin ban by the European Economic Community basically destroyed the sealskin market, and the value of sealskins dropped significantly. The anti-sealing campaigns unintentionally pushed away the Inuit from the resources that they had customarily depended on for their cultural independence. Even if it will not rectify the damages done, some environmental organizations have defended indigenous harvesting, and some others have retracted their positions opposing. One of them is Greenpeace, which expressed an official apology to the Inuit communities for the damages Greenpeace have caused with the anti-sealskin campaigns. However, later campaigns and activities by Greenpeace have shown that the apology did not come from the heart.

### **The Written Declaration 0038/2006**

In September 2006, the Greenland authorities became aware of the fact that the European Parliament adopted the Written Declaration 0038/2006 - requesting the Commission to draft a regulation to ban the import, export and sale of all harp and hooded seal products. The same request are to be found in the European Parliaments comments on the Commission Communication on a Community Action Plan on the Protection and Welfare of Animals 2006-2010. Greenland has expressed its concern on the Written Declaration - together with a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the issue - in a letter

sent to each member of the Parliament and has stated the same concern to the Commissioners in the Commission responsible for different aspects of this file. Greenland was extremely worried about the fact that the written declaration was based on poor argumentation and somewhat inaccurate documentation. E.g. in the period from 2000 to 2004, the traditional hunt of harp seals in Greenland accounts for 21 % of the harp seals caught, and not merely 3 % as mentioned in the Written Declaration 0038/2006. This could have lead members of the European Parliament to vote in favour of the written declaration.

### **EU Commission proposal of 23 July 2008 to the EU Parliament**

The EU Commission has put forward a proposal to the EU Parliament and the Council banning the import, transit and export of sealskins from Europe of seal products. The proposal is the Commission's reply to the declaration from September 2006 from the Parliament on introduction of an import stop for seal products with the exemptions of Inuit hunt and a derogation on humane killing.

The proposal is based on article 95 in the treaty on harmonisation of member states and article 133 on common trade policy, hence with the purpose of better harmony in the EU legislation and to stop the trade to and in the EU of seal products. The purpose with the suggested legislation is to make sure that seal products will not come from animals having experienced unnecessary pain.

The Commission refers to animal welfare and protection with the Commission Communication on a Community Action Plan on the Protection and Welfare of Animals 2006-2010. The Action Plan was initiated to secure a more coordinated and consequent effort for animal protection and welfare across the political areas of the Commission, while also considering the aspects of the socio-economic impact.

The proposal furthermore refers to a risk analysis from 6 December 2007 on seal hunting and animal welfare (Animal Welfare Aspects of the Killing and Skinning of Seals – Scientific Opinion of the Panel on Animal Health and Welfare), made by The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). The analysis is based on data on seal hunting and expert statements. The conclusion is that seals can and normally is killed in a quick and effective manner, without causing unnecessary pain. It was also shown that the killings methods and effectiveness varies.

Finally, the proposal refers to an analysis of consequence of 6 April 2008 (Assessment of the Potential Impact of a ban of Products Derived from Seal Species), by the Consultancy firm COWI. The conclusion of the analysis is that a ban will have a negligible economic influence in the member countries with the exception of Denmark and Italy. The main socio-economic impact will be in countries with an Inuit population.

Greenland would like to highlight its discontent with the results of both above mentioned reports in general and especially about the paragraphs regarding Greenland and other items. Greenland was invited to contribute and did this to a high extend. However, the given information was poorly used and some forwarded important copies of documents were not even included in the review or list of documents. Greenland therefore has serious concerns in respects to what the reports could lead to,

and today we can see the result presented as a ban proposal and request of introduction of labelling and certification.

In addition, the declaration and the proposal ignore the realities of the international marketplace, which is highly integrated. Greenlandic hunters depend on the income derived from the sale of their seal products to support their traditional subsistence hunting activity. Closing the European market to harp and hooded seal products, would almost certainly lead to another global collapse in prices and demand of seal products, similar to what happened after the 1983 EEC Directive, which also included an exemption for Greenlandic products and which proved to be entirely inappropriate. Since then, the subsistence hunting of seals in Greenland has had to be heavily subsidized in order to ensure reasonable income for Inuit hunters dependent on selling sealskins.

### **IUCN and abundant seal populations**

Greenland would also like to direct the attention to the 3<sup>rd</sup> congress of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) – The World’s largest conservation organization - in Bangkok, Thailand, 17-25 November 2004, where the following resolution on conservation and sustainable use of seals was adopted by an overwhelming majority of the government and non-government member organizations. Twenty-three EU member states are members of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and all have adopted its philosophy of sustainable use of the world’s abundant renewable resources as government policy:

*“URGES IN PARTICULAR IUCN members to put their sustainable use principles into action by not introducing new legislation that bans the importation and commercialization of seal products stemming from abundant seal populations, provided that obligations and requirements under other international conventions such as CITES are met.”*

8 mill. seals can have an impact on the fish resources in Greenlandic waters, even if the relation is not fully understood by the scientist. Marine resources are of high importance both as a local and a global food supply and are Greenland’s most important export goods. The world’s need for food is not showing signs of diminishing and Greenland reserves its right to protect and have a sustainable harvest from its marine resources.

### **Effective and humane killing methods**

It seems that the main goal of The Written Declaration 0038/2006 and the EU proposal is to prevent cruelty against animals. The declaration stated: *“a team of international veterinarians concluded that 42 % of the slaughtered seals they examined may have been skinned whilst still conscious.”* This is a serious claim, based on the biased interpretation of data from a report ordered by an extreme animal welfare organization. The hunting of seals in Canada is subject to strict and extensive control measures, which have lead to the use of effective and humane killing methods. The Canadian authorities are constantly working on ensuring that all seals are killed as humane as possible. Reducing the competitiveness of the hunt is one of the efforts currently being implemented in the Canadian seal hunt. The Canadian Government, when announcing the Atlantic Seal Management Plan (2006-2010) in March 2006, stated



that new management measures have been introduced in 2006 and will be in 2009 to reduce the competitive nature of the hunt and secure the effectiveness of the killing, thereby improving the humaneness of the hunt.

In January 2006, NAMMCO stated that the applied killing methods in Canada, both the use of hakapik and riffle, are efficient and humane and that the excessive allegations that seals are skinned alive are incorrect. A study carried out by recognized veterinarians in the field show that this concerns less than 2 % of the total catch, which is not killed humanely. Likewise the EFSA report stated that the use of hakapik is when used correctly a fast and efficient way of killing.

**Box 5: Myoglobin and swimming reflexes**

Seals may show swimming reflexes long after having been killed. This is due to a high content of myoglobin (red blood cells) in the blood, which is characteristic for marine mammals that can stay under water for a long period of time. Hence reflexes may continue for up to several minutes after the seal has been killed. This has been used in anti-sealskin campaigns to present Canadian sealing as inhumane where it is alleged that seals in many cases are skinned alive. Thus, the rhetoric in the sealskin discussion is often characterised by resting on incorrect arguments and not on objective documentation and facts. When it is mentioned in the Written Declaration 0038/2006 that up to 42 % of the seals in Canadian sealing may be skinned alive, it is based on a study carried out by IFAW (International Fund for Animal Welfare), an organisation which has been refused membership of IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) due to their militant working methods. The Canadian authorities have also rejected the allegations from IFAW as being completely wrong. Other studies carried out by recognised veterinarians in the field show that this problem may concern less than 2 % of the total catch, which is not killed humanely. As late as in January 2006, NAMMCO announced that the applied catching methods in Canada, both the use of hakapik and riffle, are efficient and humane and that the allegations that seals should be skinned alive are incorrect.

## 11. Sealskin and trade barriers

Four Committees under the EU Parliament are working on the EU proposal: Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI), Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI), Committee on International Trade (INTA) and Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO) with IMCO as lead. The IMCO report contains a number of changes to the Commissions proposal from being a total ban with exemptions for Inuit to a proposal based on control of origin and robust labelling and certification. In April 2009 a vote in plenum is expected in Strasbourg.

The fur industry already has a labelling system called Origin Assured (OA), introduced in 2006, where Canada, Norway, USA and Greenland are voluntary parts. OA, like wise the tannery Great Greenland A/S has a very recognizable logo and bar code. This should have had a protective effect on the products; however, what has been observed especially in 2008 is a negative outcome harming the Greenlandic trade. Hence indicating that certification and labelling may not protect the trade with its

derogations of humane hunting and Inuit exemption. Greenland has started a thorough evaluation and intends to make an analysis of the possible consequences of labelling and certification.

A ban on import of sealskin to the EU or bans on the processing and manufacturing of seal products in member countries would create new barriers to trade. Most countries and organisations in the world work hard to promote trade in order to benefit from liberalisation, not least the EU. It is thus the policy of the EU to promote a responsible free trade not only in the WTO-DDA negotiations, but also in relation to the ACP countries and the countries and areas covered by the OCT-arrangement, to which Greenland belong. The idea is to integrate vulnerable economies into international trade in a responsible way, which means that the EU is opening up for trade from developing economies.

A further limitation on the import of sealskins or a Commission tolerance of member countries breaking international agreements on Technical Barriers to Trade would be a clear contravention of the trade policy foundation of the EU. Greenland, even if it has Self-Government, receive more than 60 % of its budget in developing assistance and is still economically in a post - colonial development mode.

According to the rules of the World Trade Organisation, an import ban on seal products would be a clear violation of international agreements and cannot be justified as an exemption of these rules. Seals do not belong to endangered species and a measure, as suggested by the EU, is not justifiable in relation to international law or even common sense.

## 12. Conclusions

### **“Inuit”, “subsistence” and “traditional hunting”**

Greenland is very concerned about the increasing interest from foreign countries to define “Inuit”, “subsistence” and “traditional hunting”. During the process of the EU ban initiative and in the increasing numbers of circulated documents in relation to the proposal, Greenland has noted with concern that several EU committees and EU member countries wish to define “Inuit”, “subsistence” and “traditional hunting”. It is the view of the Greenland Home Rule Government that EU should stick to definitions already adopted by UN and that other not defined terms should be defined in relevant fora with the participation of relevant indigenous peoples and governments.

The sincere concerns are raised due to risk of misinterpretation and unintended consequences of definitions by a party that is not directly related to Inuit societies. The definitions could lead to further limitations and misunderstood debate on our way of life, culture and dependence of seal resources.

It should also be stressed that if the proposal will be adopted it will breach the Declaration adopted by the UN on the Right of the Indigenous Peoples from September 2007.

Every party is interested in securing the welfare aspects of targeted wild animals, whether you support harvest or not of wild animals. Greenland is very aware of the general support for the Inuit exemption; however, some parties are worried that the exemption can be misused. This claim should be documented with proofs from those who stated that Inuit exemptions are misused.

Alongside the sustainable harvest, respectable regulations and the importance of seal to Inuit, the hunting in Greenland is humane. All this should imply that Greenland would not be harmed by the proposal, which unfortunately does not seem to be true. Greenland suffered severely from the 1983 EU-Directive, and it has taken almost two and a half decades to re-establish an economic viable production of sealskins. A ban will once more destroy the global market for sealskin and not just certain parts of the market. The consumer can not see the difference between sealskins provided by Inuit hunters and skins provided by others. The well known Great Greenland logo and the bar code has existed several decades, however, it remains unclear if this is sufficient for EU.

The proposal by IMCO on labelling and certifications in stead of ban is more acceptable for us. However, Greenland needs time to examine the total impacts of such a system, especially when the costs, control, monitoring and administration burden is suggested to be financial covered by the sealskin industry. It is our preliminary evaluation that the industry, which is in a crisis, will not be able to cover the costs, hence this will lead to more government subsidizing.

The 1983 sealskin ban by the European Economic Community destroyed the sealskin market, and the values of sealskins dropped significantly. Starting with the adopted Declaration from 2006, we have already seen severe negative effects and consequences of the proposal. If the proposal is adopted, Greenland fears that societies outside Greenland and a Union which Greenland is not part of, may destroy our way of life and disturb the diversity of culture. Thus, Greenland cannot accept further restrictions on trade with sealskins, promoted by extreme animal activist groups and eco-colonialism. Greenland will seriously consider the working relation with the EU in connection with the Midterm evaluation of the Fisheries Partnership Agreement between Greenland and EU, which will commence in the spring 2009. An agreement should be satisfactory for both parties. Furthermore, it is our sincere evaluation that it is not going to help EU to pose a ban or other trade restrictions when thinking of the EU wish to be involved in Arctic policy. The EU proposal and the Arctic policy do not comply well and are seen as counterproductive.

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