

THE SEAL HUNT IN CANADA – A Fact of Life since Millennia!

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Whilst some Australians might find this article a little off-the-path it is really just the episode that needs to be exposed to the greater hunting community in Australia for it demonstrates very vividly the ‘Animal Rights’ movement and their impact upon those who live from the rewards of full-time hunting and gathering. This could well apply here in Australia as the Humane Society International and International Fund for Animal Welfare begin to establish their offices in our country in readiness to make an assault upon the very values that we, here in Australia, as ‘hunters and gatherers’, will be challenged with. Make no bones about it, the animal rights movement is alive and well in Australia, right through to the highest level of politics, and as one who has lobbied for a modern day sealing industry to commence in Australia – due to the impact of seals upon our southern fisheries there is no one more informed than yours truly!

My journey began 20 years ago when I moved to Phillip Island, an Island mass off the coast of Victoria and home to the largest fur seal colony in Australia. I became involved with the fishing industry, writing submissions to State and Federal government agencies and working intermittently on a commercial vessel and soon became very aware of the impact seals have upon our fisheries. I travelled world-wide to international conferences to better understand the marine ecosystem and during these travels I networked with many, including my good friends in Canada, some full-time sealers. This is a journey to expose the hunt in Canada as truly one of the greatest conservation programs ever waged, as the Canadian Government and other pro-hunting agencies fight for their survival as the ‘dark-siders’ pour their propaganda out into the world’s media and attack the very essence of survival for those who live in a wonderful world of snow, ice and the many blessings that surround them and enable the people of the north Atlantic to still “live from the land”. For many Australians, images from the former ‘Northern Exposure’ television series would conjure up a mystical tour of hunting and adventure and the fight for survival, against the elements of nature, which was what living in these isolated communities used to be like until the Animal Rights movement realised there was a great deal of money to be made by tugging at the heart strings of urbanites – those throughout the world who simply put in their week’s work and then purchase their food requirements without any realisation of the effort that has procured the very sustenance they desire and purchase to survive.

The sad reality for rural farmers and fishermen is that we live in an urban world wherein the “bambi syndrome” has permeated the consciousness of city dwellers. Urban peoples do not make the “connect” between the food they eat and the killing that produces that food.

Jim Winter, Canadian Sealer.

It was back in the 1970’s and 1980’s when photos were flashed around the world through the emerging electronic media of seals being clubbed to death. The sad story behind this is NOT the clubbing of the seals, which had been going on since the beginning of time for those in the North Atlantic, but that Animal Rights activists had recognised the means by which they could tug the heart strings of many throughout the world so that donations could be forwarded to ‘stop the killing’. It is true that commercial fishing devastated the cod stocks on the Grand Banks but this

was capably assisted by seals with their voracious appetite. Numbering 1.7 million at the time, pressure from overseas agencies and Governments forced an immediate ban on the hunting of ‘whitecoats’ and ‘bluebacks’, (young harp and hooded seals, respectively), from the Canadian seal hunt until a Royal Commission could be undertaken. During this period the hunt for adult seals continued. Remember, this hunt had been going on since the beginning of human habitation in the circumpolar region of the North Atlantic, to feed and clothe those natives, (indigenous peoples of the Inuit and Innu peoples), alongside Caucasian hunters and fishermen who had travelled to one of the last frontiers upon planet earth. The impending “Malouf” Royal Commission drew out many of the issues that affected local people and the value of the hunt towards re-establishing the valuable cod fishery and other concerns but during the course of the inquiry the ‘animal rights’ activists destroyed the seal products trade, particularly in Europe – causing great financial hardship. The process of the Royal Commission took several years to complete its findings, which recommended a ban on hunting ‘bluebacks’ and ‘whitecoats’, and before long the seal population had tripled in population, from 1.7 million to over five million, but the collateral damage to the indigenous peoples of the region was catastrophic! Given no income and forced to line-up on the dole queues these proud ‘hunters and gatherers’ were humiliated by becoming welfare dependant and during this time many committed suicide with alcoholism and social dysfunction affecting their daily lives. They were being destroyed by ‘cultural imperialists’. The animal rights groups could be truly proud of their efforts, not only had they stopped the hunt but they had increased the seal population dramatically – with other ecosystem imbalances occurring - but most horrifically the impacts upon the people of the circum polar region was devastating. This is how the animal rights activists discount the needs and rights of people as they idolise animals and make handsome financial gains on the way. It has been reported that even though the IFAW has been continuously discredited in Canada due to the impacts upon the indigenous peoples they now raise around \$70 million dollars in the United Kingdom and other countries – pushing their propaganda and still using the photos of baby seals and their blood stained fur and surrounding ice – a practise that was banned when the Royal Commission was completed over 20 years ago.

The Animal Rights movement raises hundreds of millions of dollars from urban people, on the backs of fishermen and farmers, selling the idea that killing animals for human use is “wrong” and manage that idea through their attacks on sealing: a concept that is an easy sell because it looks ugly. Since when has ugly meant bad and pretty meant good?

Jim Winter, Canadian Sealer

I was fortunate to meet one of the leading researchers from the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans whilst attending an international conference. He explained to me in detail the impacts seals also had upon other species in the marine ecosystem and from his discussions my knowledge has exploded – he now works with the Japanese Institute of Cetacean Research on a journey to re-introduce regulated commercial whaling. Another marine issue that I support!

To the credit of the Canadian Government they have staved-off assault upon assault as the ‘do-good’ animal rights activists who lead the protest entourage, year after year. These people are similar to those animal rights activists that Australian duck hunters and kangaroo industry people are confronted by. In the early days, the seal protestors were lead by the likes of Brigitte Bardot, (found guilty in France of cruelty to animals and of inciting racism), a strikingly attractive

actress of international acclaim. More recently the animal rights movement have co-opted the services of Paul McCartney and his estranged wife Heather, for the benefit of stopping the Canadian seal hunt and later, American actress, Pamela Anderson.

In counter-action, capably assisted by university professors and the sealing industry, the Canadians have established a great range of seal related products that not only include the valuable pelts, but additionally the meat made into a protein hydrolysate, (high protein food supplement similar to a Sustagen-like food supplement used by the elderly and body builders) as well as the production of seal oil omega 3. This latter product is presently getting world acclaim, beyond that of fish oil, for the oil from seals is the highest grade naturally available. The seals eat the fish, remove the Vitamin A and then concentrate the omega 3 fatty acids – a great supplement that is proving to be most successful in managing mental disorders as well as arthritis and heart disorders, with many other benefits emerging as research continues. Despite 100% usage of the Canadian harp seals and their non-listing on any endangered or threatened species listing the ‘antis’ are still accosting the Canadian Government, their fishing and sealing industries by destroying fur prices, lobbying European Governments to boycott Canadian seal products, (despite a United Nation’s, World Conservation Union recommendation to harvest seals in their conservation management), as well as lobbying restaurant chains and major buyers of Canadian seafood to boycott Canadian product. Canada has actually taken Belgium and Holland to the World Trade Organisation, for their bans on Canadian seal products are in contravention of the WTO. For those in the Australian Kangaroo Industry this will just seem par for the course but to Australian hunters we need to be made aware of the power these people have obtained, basically because we have allowed them to evolve!

The vast majority of western people accept the need for animal conservation, humane killing principles, scientific resource management, and a green approach to the sustainable use of natural resources – seals, cows, deer, pigs, boar, birds, kangaroo, sheep, lambs, calves and so on – for human use; Conservation is not to be misrepresented as ‘animal rights’, but by confusing the issue the Animal Rights movement is able to pursue its goal by drawing in both politicians and urban peoples under the guise of “doing good”. To paraphrase Winston Churchill; never have so few co-opted so many for so little

Jim Winter, Canadian Sealer.

The Canadian seal hunt is operational today and starts in March of each year. There is an annual quota decided by a multi-national scientific committee and still the ‘antis’ continue to solicit the services of high profile celebrities to push forward their intentions. Nowadays the seals are largely harvested using rifles from boats, both large and small and from highly mobile snow skidoos. It is rare to find a sled and dog team or a skin canoe with a lone hunter but there are those who still hunt in the traditional manner. The hakapick is still used extensively in the lower Gulf regions of the Megdellan Islands & Quebec due to hunter concentrations and their close proximity to other hunters during the harvest whereas 98% of seals are shot with a rifle in Newfoundland and Labrador. Quotas are usually set over three years, with the last being a million animals – averaging 300,000 plus each year, as weather permits. These are taken from a range of age classes as the penis of the male animals fetches high prices on the Asian market. The haka pick, although a traditional killing implement, has been largely left behind in preference to rifle use except where hunter presence is dangerous for the use of a firearm. The

skulls of seals are extremely thin and death is instant when struck by the haka pick but rifles seem to be the preferred method as hunters come under more and more scrutiny. Teams of veterinary surgeons have attended the hunt and supervised without complaint. The seals are killed quite humanely with dead animals skinned. The 'antis' have circulated stories of seals being skun alive but there is a simple eye reflex test that is completed to assure the animal is dead before skinning is undertaken. All Canadian sealers have to undertake a course before being licenced to hunt seals. And for the newcomer this might take several years as an apprentice before full licencing is approved. The skill of hunters is honed to a fine level where shots are taken from the ice and both small and large vessels that are also utilised during the non-fishing period for commercial fishing, for the waters of the North Atlantic are very productive and Canadian seafood products are premium.

Canadian sealers are strictly licensed and the government, which daily monitors the actions of the fishermen to ensure humane killing practices and adherence to the quotas, manages the hunt as well as setting quotas established under rigorous scientific guidelines. It is, arguably, the best managed wildlife slaughter (another word co-opted to be a negative by the A.R. movement) in the world.

Jim Winter, Canadian Sealer.

A typical hunter will shoot and skin his animals immediately, folding and salting down the pelts whilst the meat is placed on ice in readiness for processing. Seal oil is processed to pharmaceutical grade but it is still considered a 'food supplement' which means it is still readily available for wide and affordable use without attracting heavy taxes.

I have made contact with Canadian Sealing Association foundation member and hunter, Jim Winter, who has kindly provided the photographs for this presentation. I have also made contact with Professor Milton Freeman, from the Circumpolar Institute in Alberta, and he has become a wonderful friend and a mentor for my own journey to lobby for a modern day sealing industry in Australia. Eugene and Helene Lapointe have also become great friends and associates of mine and integral to my network as a conservationist. Eugene is a former CITES Secretariat General and came out to Australia in 2001 to assist me in launching my sealing campaign in Australia. You can view articles that I have had published on the World Conservation Trust website at www.iwmc.org. If you go to the Forum section you will see two of my articles; "A Recipe for Disaster" and "A Recipe for Recovery". Whilst my efforts to date in beginning seal harvesting in Australia have been thwarted by Government, despite Commonwealth Government funded reports that indicate we should be addressing seals, I am endeavouring to establish an international network to distribute seal oil omega 3 capsules I have procured from Canada To this end I have targeted countries such as China, Japan and Poland where animal rights issues are not a concern. It is sad that Australia might miss-out on this great opportunity but this is reflective of the attitudes developing in this country which is why I have undertaken this presentation to avert the loss of any further 'hunting and gathering' activities.

All rural people and manufactures of animal based food, clothing and furniture are under attack. Divided we will be conquered. United we have a chance of surviving. So, do we fight for our lifestyles and livelihoods or roll over and accept the new order. Seals are simply the tactic not the goal.

Anti-sealing is the second greatest propaganda campaign of the 20th century.

Jim Winter, Canadian Sealer

In closing, my network in Norway, where seals are also commercially harvested, have taken on a novel approach whereby visiting ‘hunters’ will be able to shoot seals as part of completing the quota of licenced hunters. This is not so far from what we see with other agencies, such as the African Wildlife Trust, whereby animals are taken for the benefit of management, science and surviving population sustainability by ‘big game’ hunters. We, in Australia, are about to be targeted by ‘animal rights’ forces such as IFAW and the Humane Society. I implore all to not discount these people for they will firstly establish their offices and then infiltrate politicians with extensive lobbying before coming out in force against hunters and fishermen. Already we have seen the loss of recreational duck hunting in several States of Australia. Be ever vigilant and know there are those around you who are tackling these hard issues but they, like me, will need your total commitment towards game and feral animal management. We must be forever diligent for the ‘dark siders’ will take our hunting away without any concern for us and our needs for animals are their paramount concern – the reason why most are vegans – and they would deny us our cultural and heritage right to hunt and gather, without batting an eyelid! Until next time good luck and safe shooting!

My thanks are extended to Jim Winter, (Celebrated Canadian Journalist and founding President of the Canadian Sealer’s Association, Prof. Milton Freeman of the Circumpolar Institute of Alberta University, Canada, and Eugene and Helene Lapointe of the World Conservation Trust based in Florida and Switzerland)

SPECIFICATIONS;

Rifle: Must have a muzzle velocity not less than 1,800 fps and a muzzle energy not less than 1,100 foot pound.

Shotgun: Not less than 20 gauge firing a rifled ‘poly-cor’ slug.

Object: To shoot seals humanely in the head with a single shot for instant death. Body shots are not encouraged as they cause extensive pelt damage.

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