



Recommendation 1776 (2006)¹

Seal hunting

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly refers to its [Recommendation 825 \(1978\)](#) on the protection of wildlife and on seal hunting, [Resolution 1012 \(1993\)](#) on marine mammals and [Recommendation 1689 \(2004\)](#) on hunting and Europe's environmental balance.
2. The harp seal – the largest resource for the sealing industry – is primarily hunted for commercial reasons, making it one of the last examples worldwide of commercial hunting of marine mammals.
3. Where hunting does not constitute a means of subsistence, its aim is to sell seal products on international markets. The countries exporting these products are Canada (the main exporter), Norway, the Russian Federation and Greenland. Europe is the main importer of raw products and exporter of manufactured goods.
4. The Assembly refers to European [Directive 83/129/EEC](#) which introduces a ban on the importation and sale of whitecoat and hooded seal pups in the European Union. It also refers to Article 30 of the Treaty establishing the European Community (Treaty of Rome) which explicitly provides for the possibility of prohibiting or restricting imports, on grounds, amongst others, of protecting the health and life of animals.
5. The Assembly welcomes the Declaration of 26 September 2006 by the European Parliament on banning seal products in the European Union requesting “the Commission to immediately draft a regulation to ban the import, export and sale of all harp and hooded seal products”.
6. The Assembly notes the fact that several member states, such as Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, have adopted national measures to ban the import and trade of products deriving from seal hunting or have begun the procedure to ban imports of sealskins.
7. Furthermore, in 1972, the United States of America adopted a ban on the catching, killing and importing of all marine mammals and on all products derived from them (Marine Mammal Protection Act). In 2006, Mexico also banned the import and export of all marine mammals and their derived products.
8. The Assembly is aware that the international controversy surrounding seal hunting is first and foremost a political debate, bringing different and sometimes conflicting values, objectives and attitudes into play, and that public opinion is particularly sensitive to this matter.
9. The Assembly notes that, during the last decade, the cruelty of seal hunting has been documented by videos from several authoritative television channels as well as by the personal observations of many members of national and European parliaments, scientists, celebrities and representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Such cruelty has generated a public morality debate in Europe.
10. The Assembly notes that the Canadian Government appears to be well aware of the current challenges and problems over seal hunting and is stepping up its efforts to address the issue through legislation and close monitoring of the enforcement of its regulations. However, the Assembly also notes that Canada currently lacks a general legal framework for the protection of animals.

1. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 17 November 2006 (see [Doc. 11008](#), report of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, rapporteur: Mr Nessa).



11. It notes that the management objectives for seal hunting announced by the Canadian Government are to ensure species conservation, long-term sustainable exploitation, humane hunting methods and the maximum possible use of the seals killed. However, the Assembly also notes that one of the current Canadian objectives is to reduce the size of the seal population.
12. The Assembly refers to the recommendations contained in the report by the Independent Veterinarians' Working Group on the Canadian Harp Seal Hunt and invites the member and observer states involved in seal hunting to take these into account.
13. Consequently, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:
 - 13.1. invite member and observer states practising seal hunting:
 - 13.1.1. to ensure that the populations of seals and other marine mammals are afforded effective protection and their numbers maintained and pursue such a conservation policy as part of an overall approach geared to the sustainable management of natural heritage and the protection of wildlife;
 - 13.1.2. to ban all cruel hunting methods which do not guarantee the instantaneous death, without suffering, of the animals, prohibiting the stunning of animals with instruments such as hakapiks, bludgeons and guns;
 - 13.1.3. to require seal hunters to follow appropriate training and grant hunting licences only to persons having passed relevant tests verified by the authorities;
 - 13.1.4. to submit their multi-annual seal hunting management plans, and their implementation details, to be verified by the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) and the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES);
 - 13.1.5. to improve the monitoring and supervision of hunting and enforcement of regulations;
 - 13.1.6. to encourage the establishment of professional seal hunters' associations supporting and promoting humane practices, with emphasis being placed on the professional nature of such hunting;
 - 13.1.7. to support researchers and scientific institutions in their research and observation activities on seals and their position in the ecosystem;
 - 13.1.8. to encourage dialogue and collaboration between observers, scientists, hunters and the monitoring and supervision authorities;
 - 13.1.9. to promote the development of the seal watching industry as a viable alternative to seal hunting;
 - 13.2. call on member and observer states to inform consumers and encourage information campaigns by NGOs on seal-derived products, their origin and the hunting methods used, in order to enable them to make a fully-informed choice taking into account the ethical aspects of respect for animal life;
 - 13.3. invite in particular the Russian Federation and Canada, as well as all member states that have not already done so, to sign and ratify the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention, ETS No. 104) and call on all Parties to this convention to ensure that its provisions are transposed into national legislation and enforced;
 - 13.4. instruct the Working Group on the Drafting of a European Hunting and Biodiversity Charter of the Bern Convention to include seals and other marine mammals, and in particular game tourism, in its work.
14. The Assembly also asks the Committee of Ministers and the parliaments of the member states to promote initiatives aimed at prohibiting the import and marketing of seal-derived products, following the United States and Mexico precedents.