

# Sealing a rightful rural occupation

Harp seal populations have doubled in size and harvesting is humane, argues **Jim Winter\***

IT'S NOW four decades since animal rights groups started their anti-sealing campaigns in Canada that have raised for them hundreds of million of dollars.

During this time Canadian sealers have taken their yearly quotas while more than doubling the population of the harp seal herd to over five million animals.

So is sealing a conservation issue? Obviously no. Harp seals are not and never have been on any respected international list of either endangered or threatened species.

During the same time the vast majority of studies – other than those sponsored by animal rights groups – have determined that both the hakapick and the rifle are humane killing tools.

The killing – while not pretty – is simply an outdoor abattoir and it is as efficient and as humane as any abattoir in the western world. So, is sealing a humane killing issue? No.

Also over the same period, many species of seals and other marine mammals have multiplied dramatically in countries where there is no hunting.

Their increased numbers are now impacting seriously on both fishermen and beach-going families.

Yet, when anyone proposes a cull or hunt – as UK and US fishermen have done, along with families on the US west coast – there is an outcry from the animal rights movement.

This is followed by ill-informed and outrageous stories in the mainstream press by journalists who accept the word of animal rights proponents rather than checking the facts.

The animal rights movement is an urban-based phenomenon whose ultimate goal is the ending of man's use of animals. They are seeking to do this by targeting rural people who need to kill to provide food and clothing for society and income to feed their families.

Seals are merely a means towards achieving a larger goal. It's seals today. But what about tomorrow: will it be sheep, lambs, cows, calves, fish, pigs, crab and/or prawns?

The animal rights movement has hijacked or co-opted the phrases 'animal

welfare' and 'animal conservation.' The same is true of the mainstream media, whose non-critical, non-analytical, knee-jerk coverage has turned them into little more than the movement's PR arm.

This has enabled the movement to disguise its goals because they know that most reasonable people will accept these two concepts, while only about 4% of western society accepts the philosophy of animal rights.

This is the cultural imposition of the views of the few on the lives of the many. And it is working.

Canadian sealers are rural people earning a living from the sea: there is only one seal hunt in Canada carried out by Inuit, Innu and Caucasian for the same reasons in the same way.

Like all rural peoples – whether fishermen or farmers – they do not have salaries. They sustain themselves through a series of work activities.

It is the sum total of this varied income that allows them to continue living in the villages and towns that have been their homes for generations.

This is no different than rural people throughout the UK, Europe and the USA. It also applies to sealers from Greenland in the north to Namibia in the south; the USA in the west to Norway in the east.

Canadian sealers are strictly licensed. The government monitors fishermen's actions daily to ensure humane killing practices and adherence to quotas, manages the hunt as well as sets quotas under rigorous scientific guidelines.

It is, arguably, the world's best managed wildlife slaughter (another word co-opted to be a negative by the animal rights movement).

## Range of products

Sealers use as much of the animal as possible to produce a range of products. They range from food and clothing to medicines, artisan art and souvenirs.

The animals sealers kill have the skin, fat, flippers (meat) and some carcasses



**A typical picture of a harp seal and hunter that appeals to urban dwellers remote from the rural and at-sea food and seal products production process.**



**Right: a shop shelf full of diverse seal products. However, there is little demand for seal products outside traditional sealing areas.**

prepared and stored on the boat.

Remaining parts of the carcass are left on the ice, which melts to return the remains to the sea where it becomes food for fish and crustaceans.

This avoids the land-based abattoir problem of disposing of offal produced by animal slaughter.

**What could be more 'green'?**

**What could be more eco-friendly?**

Sealing communities desire to see even greater use of the meat but, outside these communities, there is no cultural habit of eating seal.

This is true even though seal is a high protein, lean and healthy meat. It also lends itself to 'meal' production – the same as fish meal. This has tremendous potential as a protein supplement in food aid programs.

## Bambi syndrome prevails

Given all of the above, it begs the question: Why attack sealing?

The sad reality is that we live in an urban world where

Bambi syndrome has permeated city dwellers' consciousness.

Urban people do not make the connection between the food they eat and the killing that produces that food. They are not used to seeing the killing that leads to the neatly packaged and plastic wrapped food they eat, or to the jackets, pants, hats, shoes, belts, purses and briefcases they wear or carry.

Therefore they can, understandably, become upset when exposed to the production side of these products.

Animal rights fanatics understand this and use Bambi syndrome as a tactic to further the goal of ending man's use of animals. Sealing is the perfect vehicle for them because it is bloody, takes place in the open air in a beautiful environment – and the animals are wrongly seen to be cute and cuddly!

The same attack approach applies – currently to a lesser degree – to fur trappers, fur farmers, cattle ranchers, sheep and pig producers; those who raise lambs for food and clothing; also those who catch fish and crustaceans. Medical and

pharmaceutical researchers are affected, too.

The animal rights movement raises its money from urban people, on the backs of fishermen and farmers, by selling the idea that killing animals for human use is "wrong."

They manage that idea through their attacks on sealing: an easy sell because it looks ugly. But since when has ugly meant bad and pretty meant good?

The movement also recognises that it can flog this message in the mainstream press with relative ease, as most mainstream media is urban-based and profit driven.

Holding demonstrations against something, having celebrity spokespersons, bloody pictures, and presenting their message as conservation, welfare, green or eco-sensitive sells newspapers, magazines and TV shows.

By co-opting the words 'conservation, welfare and green,' they are also able to appeal to urban-based politicians and, onwards, to parliaments. They are led to believe that their constituents genuinely accept the animal rights agenda.

In reality very few constituents fall into the animal rights camp.

## Confusing the issue

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, birds, kangaroo, sheep, calves and so on – for human use.

By confusing the issue, the animal rights movement can pursue its goal by drawing in both politicians and urban people under the guise of "doing good."

The animal rights movement also recognises that rural people are not a single group but, rather, are widely dispersed groups with diverse interests.

The same is true of the manufacturers of food, clothing and medicinal products. They are then open to a 'divide and conquer' approach where they can be successfully pitted against each other.

Fishermen, farmers and manufacturers in the UK,

