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PRESS INFORMATION

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Commission urged to ban seal products immediately after new evidence of cruel practices

European parliamentarians have joined forces with animal welfare organisations from all over Europe to press the European Commission for an immediate ban on seal products after fresh evidence emerged of cruel and wasteful practices in the ongoing seal hunt in Canada.

Pictures and footage shot this month refute Canada's claims that new rules have made the annual hunt more humane. The graphic evidence shows hunters ignoring the regulations, failing to kill seals quickly, and hooking and hoisting live seals into boats. In addition many of the seals injured or killed are lost to the waves as hunters are unable to reach them in time. For these reasons animal welfare organisations from all over Europe led by IFAW, Humane Society International (HSI), GAIA and Eurogroup for Animals and supported by European parliamentarians are today holding simultaneous press conferences in their own country.

Sheryl Fink, senior researcher at IFAW, visited the East Coast of Canada earlier this month to witness first hand the clubbing and shooting of seal pups. She said: "No-one who sees the suffering captured on video this year could maintain the hunt has become more humane. Our footage shows the hunt is as cruel as it has always been, and it has no place in a modern country such as Canada."

Mark Glover, director of HSI UK, said: "Our video evidence shows repeated violations of the few regulations that exist to protect seals in Canada, and proves Canada's commercial seal hunt is inherently inhumane. Only a comprehensive ban on seal product trade in the European Union will satisfy European citizens and the European Parliament, and end EU complicity in this cruel slaughter."

Sonja Van Tichelen, director of Eurogroup for Animals, said: "The Commission should ban the import of seal products now to show citizens in Europe are not willing to support this cruel hunt. It has already been banned in several countries, and the Commission should follow their good example."

The seal hunt has also been condemned by members of the Parliamentary Intergroup for the Welfare and Conservation of Animals and other European parliamentarians.

Dr Caroline Lucas MEP, vice-president of the all-party Intergroup on the Welfare and Conservation of Animals, commented: "Parliamentarians have time and again called for action on the largest ever killing of marine mammals in the world. We fully support a ban on seal products to show enough is enough."

Animal welfare organisations and MEPs are not calling for an end to traditional Inuit seal hunting (in accordance with humane animal welfare standards). Canadian Inuit hunting of harp seals in the Canadian Arctic accounts for about 1%. The ban only addresses the large scale commercial seal hunting. Moreover, it also applies to seal products deriving from commercial hunts elsewhere, such as in Namibia and Russia.

Stavros Dimas, the EU's environment commissioner, is expected to produce a recommendation on a possible ban this summer.

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Pictures and footage can be found on www.thenewsmarket.com/ifaw/ and www.protectseals.org

For more information call Günther Pauls, communications officer at IFAW EU, on 0032 (0) 282 0693 or email him on gpauls@ifaw.org. Outside office hours please call 0032 (0)473 86 34 61. Or call Steven Blaakman, senior press officer at Eurogroup for Animals, on 0032 (0)27400823 or email him on s.blaakman@eurogroupforanimals.org. Outside office hours please call 0032 (0)475 731066.

Notes:

- Eurogroup for Animals represents animal welfare organisations in nearly all European member states. Since it was launched in 1980, the organisation has succeeded in encouraging the European Union to adopt higher legal standards of animal protection. For more information about Eurogroup, visit www.eurogroupforanimals.org.
- The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) is one of the world's largest animal welfare and conservation charities, which is dedicated to improving the welfare of wild and domestic animals throughout the world by reducing commercial exploitation of animals, protecting wildlife habitats, and assisting animals in distress. For more about IFAW, visit www.ifaw.org.
- The Humane Society International (HSI) addresses issues such as inhumane practices and conditions affecting companion and farm animals, illegal trade in wildlife, threats to endangered species, slaughter of marine mammals, and the use of animals in research and testing. For more information, visit www.hsi.org.
- GAIA, or Global Action in the Interest of Animals, unites human defenders of animal welfare and advocates for animal rights in Belgium. Brussels based

GAIA was the leading Belgian organisation successfully campaigning for the Belgian ban on the trade of all seals products of all species of seals. For more information, visit www.gaia.be.

- A ban on seal products is widely supported by European parliamentarians. In 2006 425 MEPs signed a resolution to urge the Commission to ban all seal products.
- The Netherlands, Belgium, Croatia, Slovenia, the US and Mexico have already banned seal products, while Germany and Italy are planning one.
- This year, the Canadian government set a quota of 275.000 seals. This is 50.000 more animals than in 2007.