



Canadian Attitudes towards Seal Hunting - 2010

Introduction

The following *Seals and Sealing Network Study* was conducted using TNS Canadian Facts' national bi-weekly telephone omnibus service. A total of 1,017 nationally representative Canadian adults were interviewed between April 12 and 18, 2010. For a survey sample this size, the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

Basic Attitudes

Canadians say “yes” to well-regulated seal hunting

Respondents to the Seals and Sealing Network’s survey were asked an initial question to see where they stand on seal hunting in general.

6 out of 10 Canadians indicated that they accept seal hunting by any hunter where populations are not endangered and animal welfare is respected.

Less than 2 out of 10 Canadians indicate they will not accept any form of seal hunting.

Of the following 4 statements which describe views about the seal hunting in Canada, which statement best describes your own personal opinion.

All forms of seal hunting are acceptable.	7 %
All seal hunters should be allowed to hunt seals, but only if seal populations are not endangered and the animals do not suffer.	55 %
Only Inuit or other aboriginal groups should be allowed to hunt seals.	20 %
No form of seal hunting is acceptable.	16 %
Don't know	2 %

Canadians recognize the economics of hunting

6 out of 10 Canadians feel that seal hunting is economically important for all who participate.

Only 1 in 10 feel the economic gain for hunters is not significant.

A follow-up question* indicated that Canadians would be more likely to find seal hunting to be economically important for all hunters if they were shown that it is essential for most hunters to continue a rural life based on sustainable hunting and fishing.

** (figures not shown)*

Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about the economic importance of seal hunting in Canada? *(two-part question)

Income earned from seal hunting is significant to both Inuit as well as commercial seal hunters	59 %
Income earned from seal hunting is only significant to commercial seal hunters	13 %
Income earned from seal hunting is only significant to Inuit seal hunters	16 %
Income earned from seal hunting is not significant to any hunter	9 %
Don't know	4 %

Canadians understand the need to manage seal populations

Regardless of their stance on seal hunting, the vast majority of Canadians recognize the importance of wildlife management for seal populations.

9 out of 10 Canadians felt that seal populations should be managed in relation to the abundance of important fish stocks.

Do you think that seal populations should be managed to help maintain or restore the abundance of important fish stocks?

Yes	85 %
No	12 %
Don't know	3 %

Knowledge of Basic Facts

Most Canadians do not know how large the current harp seal population is

94% of Canadians were unable to indicate the correct estimate of the Northwest Atlantic harp seal population (the primary resource for most seals hunted in Canada).

In fact, 75% of Canadians think the population is much lower than it actually is.

Canadians have little knowledge of seal products

Asked an open question about types of seal products they were aware of, most Canadians could not think of a great variety.

5 out of 10 indicated they were aware of skin/fur products, and 3 out of 10 spoke of meat products.

Only 1 out of 10 demonstrated an awareness of seal oil as common product from Canadian seal hunts.

Which number would you say comes closest to current 2010 estimates of the size of the harp seal population in Canadian waters?

500,000	29 %
2.1 million	35 %
4.5 million	10 %
6.9 million*	6 %
Don't know	19 %

**The correct answer.*

*Please name for me all of the types of seal products that you have heard of.**

Seal skin/fur products	47 %
Seal meat products	25 %
Seal oil products	14 %

** Percentage who named at least one product from the given category.*

European Ban

Canadians do not know why the European Union is banning seal products...

Asked about their understanding of what is the EU's primary justification for the ban, 8 out of 10 were of the opinion that the ban has been adopted due to public concern for seal population conservation (17%) or the welfare of individual seals hunted (62%).

Only 12% knew that the objective of the EU's legislation is to define the commercial sale of seal products as immoral and to make profiting from such commerce illegal.

... or how the ban will impact Inuit seal hunters

Fully 6 out of 10 Canadians felt that the European Union ban on commercial seal products would either increase (20%) or leave Inuit seal trade untouched (41%).

Only 3 in 10 Canadians were aware that the EU ban will have a negative impact on Inuit trade.

To your knowledge, what was the primary justification for the European Union to place a ban on Canadian seal products?

Public concerns that commercial sealing has been decreasing seal populations	17 %
Public concerns over cruelty in hunting methods	62 %
Public concern that profiting from the sale of seal products is immoral	12 %
Don't know	9 %

... the European Union made a special exemption in its recent seal products ban, to allow for products to be traded from "traditional" Inuit seal hunts. What effect, if any, do you think this legislation will have for Inuit seal hunters?

Their trade in seal products will increase	20 %
Their trade in seal products will continue as usual	41 %
Their trade in seal products will decrease	34 %
Don't know	5 %

Issues of Concern

Two-part questions.

Animal Welfare

Between 7 and 8 out of 10 respondents felt initially that Canadian seal hunting practices respect animal welfare.

2 in 10 Canadians felt the practices do not at all respect animal welfare.

In follow-up, 6 out of 10 of those who had doubts about respect for animal welfare said they would be more likely to support seal hunting if they were shown that in fact several independent peer-reviewed veterinarian studies have concluded that the prescribed Canadian hunting practices meet established requirements for animal welfare.

To what degree do you think Canadian seal hunting practices respect animal welfare? Would you say... ?

Animal welfare is completely respected	16 %
Animal welfare is somewhat respected	59 %
Animal welfare is not at all respected	22 %
Don't know	3 %

Hunting Regulations

Less than 7 out of 10 respondents initially were confident that seal hunters follow the Canadian Marine Mammal Regulations.

3 in 10 were not confident in this.

In follow-up, 6 in 10 who were not "very confident" said they would be more supportive of seal hunting if they were shown that Canadian Fisheries Officers closely monitor hunting activity, that sealers who violate the Marine Mammal Regulations are penalized, and that sealers' associations take a proactive approach to encourage compliance with the regulations.

How confident are you that seal hunters follow the regulations surrounding seal hunting in Canada? Would you say you are... ?

Very confident	14 %
Somewhat confident	54 %
Not confident at all	29 %
Don't know	3 %

Conservation

Without the aid of other information, 7 out of 10 Canadians have confidence that hunting seals will not endanger Canada's seal populations.

3 out of 10 had no level of confidence.

In a follow-up question, the percentage of those who were "very confident" doubled (to 38%), while those "not at all confident" were nearly halved (to 16%), after the following statement was read:

In March, 2009 the World Wildlife Fund stated that the harp seal population is at a near record high and current harvest practices pose no apparent threat to the long-term health of the species. Since then, new research shows that the harp seal population has further increased from about 5 million to a new record high of 6.9 million seals.

How confident are you that that the harp seal hunt in Canada is well-regulated to ensure that the species will not become endangered as a result of hunting? Are you ... ?

Part 1

Very confident	19 %
Somewhat confident	50 %
Not at all confident	29 %
Don't know	2 %

Part 2

Very confident	38 %
Somewhat confident	46 %
Not at all confident	16 %
Don't know	2 %

Perspectives

Canadians welcome new information on seal hunting

Approximately 4 out of 10 respondents to the survey felt they would be more supportive of seal hunting in Canada based on the information presented to them during the survey.

6 out of 10 would maintain their current position on the activity.

Only 5% indicated they would be less supportive based on this information.

Given what we have discussed, how much has your view on seal hunting changed? Would you say your position on seal hunting in Canada has ... ?

Become much more supportive	9 %
Become somewhat more supportive	29 %
Not changed	57 %
Become somewhat less supportive	3 %
Become much less supportive	2 %
Don't know	< 1 %

Canadians want hunters to speak for themselves

Given a choice to pick the most credible source of information on seal hunting, Canadians are most likely to want information from fishermen and sealers who have first hand-knowledge of the activity.

Canadians are least likely to seek out information from activist groups who oppose seal hunting.

Of the following groups, who do you think provides the most credible information about seal hunting in Canada:

Activist Groups	20 %
Canadian Government	21 %
Fishermen and Sealers	30 %
Academics	24 %
Don't know	5 %

Conclusion

Public opinion in Canada clearly shows understanding and a majority support for seal hunting.

In principle, Canadians are not opposed to seal hunting, whether it is by Inuit or non-Inuit hunters, and they tend to become more supportive of all Canadian participation in this activity when factual context is provided for relevant concerns.

This data stands in stark contradiction to previous studies produced by activist groups, which have suggested Canadian opposition to seal hunting.

For more information on seals and seal hunting, visit the Seals and Sealing Network at www.sealsandsealing.net, or e-mail info@sealsandsealing.net.