

Canadian Seal Hunt

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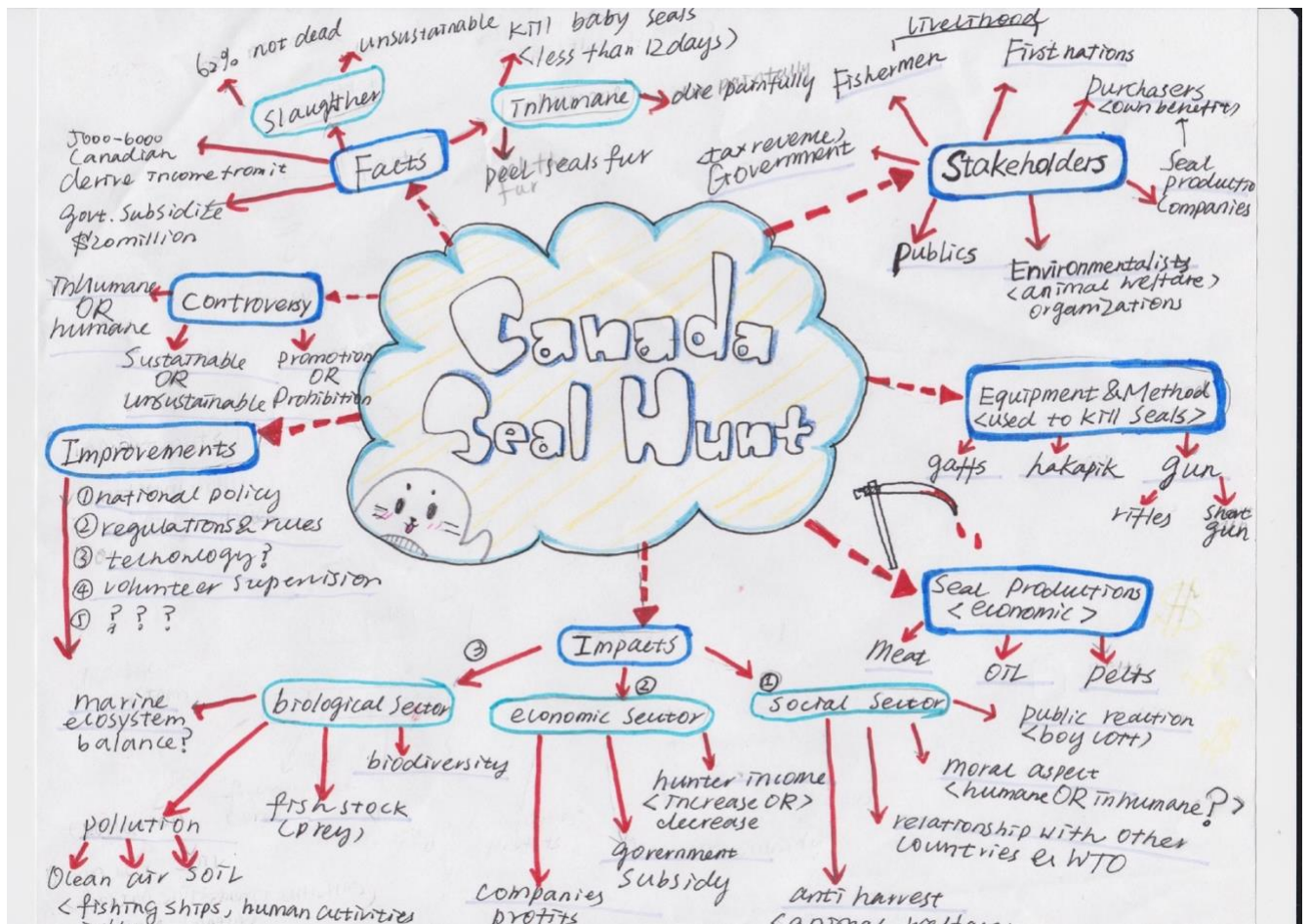
Introduction

The seal hunt in Canada is a serious environmental issue that draws a lot of public and media attention. The process involves immense violence, has questionable reasoning, methods and regulations, and is performed on a large scale. Currently, Canada is accountable for the majority of commercial sealing in the world ("Canadian seal harvest", 2015). Merchants and fishermen can earn a profit by selling seal products while the government can also benefit from their export ("An introduction", n.d.). There are other stakeholders involved such as the seal product purchasers and the First Nations who consume seal products.

There are others who would like to put an end to the consumption of seal products. Some animal welfare organizations boycott those supermarkets and retailers that sell seal products. It is also notable that some countries have already banned seal trade activities (Lavigne and Williams, 2011).

In this report, firstly, a mental map provides the basic structure of our research. Then we will define why the seal hunt is a wicked problem and we will introduce the major stakeholders. Additionally, we will discuss the decisionmakers of the issue and how the governance is influenced by international, federal, social, and cultural issues.

Framing the problem



The Canadian seal hunt, as a controversial topic, has become a wicked problem because of the existing conflict between the animal welfare organizations and the stakeholders. Recently, people found that the population of seal pups has decreased precipitously ("An introduction", n.d.). Hence, the voices that wish to protect seals became louder and as a result, the conflicts between animal welfare organizations and seal hunters became more contentious. The seal hunt is a unique problem, and it seems to be neither right nor wrong, as there are many different views. Furthermore, there are other stakeholders who get involved in this issue, for example the Canadian government, whose attitudes are ambiguous. As the world's largest commercial marine mammal slaughter (Butterworth, 2012), the Canadian seal hunt provides the basic income for Coastal fishermen, a market for overseas consumers, and tax revenue. For those reasons and others, the seal hunt is legal in Canada and the Canadian government supports the development of seal markets; that means seal hunt activities cannot be entirely banned in this country, which complicates the issue. Presently there are no solutions that can satisfy both the stakeholders and the animal welfare groups, making this problem persistent.



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Governance

The Canadian commercial seal hunt is controversial and leads to heated debate from the perspectives of sustainable stock management and humane killing. Canadian authorities, especially the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, are the key decision makers in this case and they claim that they have carefully incorporated different interests of stakeholders, such as aboriginal sealers, Asian markets, and European authorities. Although the government should undertake science-based decision-making that has transparency, accountability, and participation, there are some problematic decision-making processes and ineffective legislation in Canada.

International laws are being considered an appropriate tool to affect the Canadian government's decisions. Generally speaking, international regulations tend to support the sustainable stock of seals. The first international law to protect seals is the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)(UN General Assembly,1982). Article 61 and 65 of this law obligate the coastal countries to avoid the over-exploitation of their environment while cooperating with other states to conserve the global marine systems. However, the Canadian government is unwilling to cooperate with other countries such as Greenland and Norway on the issue of seal conservation (Alder, Lugten, Kay, & Ferriss, 2001). Therefore, UNCLOS has little power in protecting seals, since it has no substantive provisions to solve issues (Hodges, 2009). There are other international agreements on conserving seals, including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO). CBD is a multilateral environmental agreement established for protecting biodiversity, but the law has no enforcement power or international standing. NAMMCO's regional effectiveness limits its influence on the Canadian government since it focuses on domestic rather than international regulations (Hodges, 2009).

Many countries and regions have banned trade of seal products to condemn the cruelty of seal hunt. As of 2013, 34 countries had banned the import of seal products, including the European Union, Russia, Sweden, the United States, and Taiwan (The Canadian Press, 2011). The ban has potential power because countries such as Russia and Taiwan used to be major importers of Canadian seal pelts ("the Canadian seal", 2013). The promotion of trade bans cut off Canada's revenue from exporting seal products, which may potentially force the government to reevaluate their policies.

The government's official website "Fisheries and Oceans Canada" shows specific details of governmental management practices for seal hunting. First of all, the Total Allowable Catch

(TAC) has been set for different species of seals. The TAC is a limitation on the maximum number of seals that can be hunted every year (Johnston & Santillo, 2005). Secondly, the harvest season and areas are set by the Marine Mammal Regulations (MMR). The regulation requires that hunting activities should take place between March and May in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Thirdly, the Canadian government has published the commercial Fisheries Licensing Policy. It requires that fishermen register for sealing licenses. In addition, the Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters carried out a policy that each province must provide training tools and certification requirements to sealers. For ensuring the humaneness of the harvest, MMR also brought out a regulation stating that seals must be killed quickly using specific tools such as high-powered rifles, shotguns firing slugs, cubs, or hakapiks ("Integrated Fisheries Management", 2011).

Some of these policies are influenced by the local culture. The First Nations people in Canada have a tradition of hunting seals for at least 4000 years and they regard seals as a resource of food and income. Therefore, considering their cultural background, the licensing policy does not require Aboriginal people and people who live north of 53°N to register licenses.

Although there are no specific agreements or policies on NGOs, their movements and activities can put pressure on the Canadian government. In 1987, under the pressure from animal welfare groups, government banned fishers from hunting the infant harp seal (white coat) and the infant hooded seals (blueback's) in commercial hunting activities (Donworth, 2012). Moreover, the environment and animal welfare organizations' boycotts on Canadian seafood industry will have an effect on Canadian seafood exporting and will bring economic hardship. In the 1984 IFAW seafood boycott, BC salmon's price dropped by 50% when exported to British fish market. Besides, the out-of-pocket costs of boycott would be 9 to 22 times larger than the economic profits of the seal hunt. Although boycotts are not agreements, they could potentially enforce governors to end the seal hunt (Best, 2004).

The Canadian government has a lot of policies applying to the management of seal hunting. Transparency, accountability and participation are three criteria to ensure that the governance is open, inclusive and effective. From the aspect of transparency, people can easily get information from the Fisheries and Ocean Canada website. Moreover, this website also has a page that lists some comparisons of myths and realities of the seal hunt. The website was last modified on June 4th, 2015, providing up-to-date information for the public ("Public views", 2005). In addition, the Canadian government also enables citizens to participate in management practices. The government has taken advice from animal protection groups that seals should not be killed alive. Sealers should also follow the "three-step process" (stunning, checking and bleeding) to avoid cruelty. ("Integrated Fishery Management", 2011) From the accountability aspect, there is little or no compliance with regulations by hunters and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans often fails to enforce and supervise the hunting activities. Another issue that needs to be addressed is that there is no local regulation found in Gulf of St. Lawrence, which is the main place for hunting. Also, the government does not give a specific sanction in situations where the numbers of seals being killed exceed the TAC. As there is a gap between federal regulation and local practices, the governance framework is regarded as having low cooperation and coordination. This can also be concluded from the gap between international agreements and domestic legislations. As a consequence, the Canadian government is gradually losing their accountability and credibility.

To conclude, there are failures in the Canadian governance framework. The Canadian government should shift the focus from economic profit to biodiversity preservation in the decision-making process. The lack of local legislation and the coordination between government departments should be improved. It is also shown that the legislation is not effective, so the government should also enhance supervision and management of the seal hunt.

Year	Pups < 1 year	Seals > 1 year	Total	TAC	Year	Pups < 1 year	Seals > 1 year	Total	TAC
1952	198,063	109,045	307,108		1981	178,394	23,775	202,169	170,000
1953	197,975	74,911	272,886		1982	145,274	21,465	166,739	186,000
1954	175,034	89,382	264,416		1983	50,058	7,831	57,889	186,000
1955	252,297	81,072	333,369		1984	23,922	7,622	31,544	186,000
1956	341,397	48,013	389,410		1985	13,334	5,701	19,035	186,000
1957	165,438	80,042	245,480		1986	21,888	4,046	25,934	186,000
1958	140,996	156,790	297,786		1987	36,350	10,446	46,796	186,000
1959	238,832	81,302	320,134		1988	66,972	27,074	94,046	186,000
1960	156,168	121,182	277,350		1989	56,346	8,958	65,304	186,000
1961	168,819	19,047	187,866		1990	34,402	25,760	60,162	186,000
1962	207,088	112,901	319,989		1991	42,382	10,206	52,588	186,000
1963	270,419	71,623	342,042		1992	43,866	24,802	68,668	186,000
1964	266,382	75,281	341,663		1993	16,401	10,602	27,003	186,000
1965	182,758	51,495	234,253		1994	25,223	36,156	61,379	186,000
1966	251,135	72,004	323,139		1995	34,106	31,661	65,767	186,000
1967	277,750	56,606	334,356		1996	184,856	58,050	242,906	250,000
1968	156,458	36,238	192,696		1997	220,476	43,734	264,210	275,000
1969	233,340	55,472	288,812		1998	251,403	31,221	282,624	275,000
1970	217,431	40,064	257,495		1999	221,027	6,794	244,603	275,000
1971	210,579	20,387	230,966	245,000*	2000	85,485	6,583	92,068	275,000
1972	116,810	13,073	129,883	150,000	2001	214,754	11,739	226,493	275,000
1973	98,335	25,497	123,832	150,000	2002	297,764	14,603	312,367	275,000
1974	114,825	32,810	147,635	150,000	2003	280,174	9,338	289,512	289,512**
1975	140,638	33,725	174,363	150,000	2004	353,553	12,418	365,971	350,000
1976	132,085	32,917	165,002	127,000	2005	319,517	11,119	329,829	319,500
1977	126,982	28,161	155,143	170,000	2006	346,426	811	354,867	335,000
1978	116,190	45,533	161,723	170,000	2007	221,488	3,257	224,745	270,000
1979	132,458	28,083	160,541	170,000	2008	217,351	285	217,636	275,000
1980	132,421	37,105	169,526	170,000					

* Quota management was implemented in 1971.

** 2003-2005 TAC was for 975,000 seals, with a maximum of 350,000 in 2 of the 3 years.

Solution

For a wicked problem, we can only propose some solutions that involve a range of stakeholders to tackle different aspects of the problem. First, we need to alleviate the destruction that has already been made. Subsequently, we can change our aim to improve the current situation. In domestic arena, the government should increase the frequency and power of supervision and execution. Then, we can focus on the root of the problem, preventing its occurrence in future. Changing the industry style might be a good alternative.

In short run, the government should realize the economic value of seals. Being short-sighted and only focusing on the value of seals' meat and fur will cause a great pecuniary loss in long run. The government should also initiate a buyout program, using funds in exchange for hunting license. Since the government has been subsidizing the seal hunt, the funds for buyout should not be a heavy burden. They did a similar buyout of cod in 1990, which bought time for that marine system. (Murray, R, 2009) Furthermore, they ought to take a supportive attitude towards the multilateral seal protection agreement and stop preventing international conventions from getting access to the area where the seal hunt takes place. We need to advocate ecosystem-based management and scientific-based decision making process. The latest technology should be integrated into daily supervision. An automatic identified system, used in fishery management, can track down the locations of illegal hunters and it should also be tracked in seal hunt activities. (Brown.L, 2015)

However, it is not realistic to expect this attitude change in the short run, unless an ecological catastrophe occurs. Public awareness and NGO campaigns may help the government to realize the problem, but in terms of the stance of the government document, the government will not address this problem immediately. Currently, the government takes a supportive attitude towards the seal hunt because of its huge economic benefit. In order to tackle this issue in root, we need to find economic solutions.

In the long run, shaping demand is a great alternative, with reference to the market mechanism. In fishery industry, there are labeling and certification systems, which result in fewer illegal catching activities. Companies related to the commercial seal hunt can also use certification or labeling systems to inform customers of their premium products which can be traced back to their origin, and the company's effort in conserving eco-regions, improving their reputation. Customers, at the same time, by voting with their wallets, make their own contributions to environmental protection. Through this process, illegal hunters may lose their market, along with the incentive to do illegal hunting. Currently, since Europe has banned seal products, its market is increasingly shrinking and the prices of products drop. Considering the soaring price of fossil fuels, it may also become less cost-effective for the hunter to go hunting. Thus, the market can be detrimental to ecosystems, but it can also prevent overexploitation.

There is a good alternative, resulting in a win-win for both the economy and environment. As mentioned above, the government may initiate a buyout program to improve the current situation. As a consequence, the original hunters may need assistance in changing the way they conduct business. They can still rely on seals to earn a profit, using the tourism industry. This would aid coastal communities in gaining worldwide attention along with the economic benefits. It can also alleviate poverty, provide more employment opportunities, as well as increase levels of investment. This alternative will alleviate the negative ecological impacts, such as habitat destruction and biodiversity loss and as it might boost the economic

development and generate a larger profit than traditional hunting, it is possible that the government and related companies will support this movement.



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Conclusion



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In this report, a detailed analysis of commercial seal hunting in Canada is presented. It is defined as a wicked problem, which requires multidimensional cooperation. It is clear that some governance failures exist, such as poor execution and mismanagement. Finally, some alternative solutions from legislative and economic perspectives in the short and long run

are proposed. There is no doubt that it is an urgent matter. Government should take the initiative and all other relevant parties should spare no effort to solve it.

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Multimedia: For example, interactive maps, documentaries and online videos (with links)

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