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Seal Killers Stopped at Sea

Scores Stuck as Sealing Vessels Are Iced In

By **LINDSAY HAMILTON**
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From WNT

Mother Nature has put a cold stop on one of Canada's most controversial hunts.

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Two weeks after the start of Newfoundland and Labrador's annual seal hunt, more than 100 vessels became stuck in heavy ice and at least 60 remained immobilized.

Crews face food, water and fuel shortages as they wait for the ice to break up.

The Canadian coast guard has been resupplying stranded boats, and the crews in the greatest danger have been airlifted to safety.

"In some cases, there are vessels at risk of sinking once the ice frees up because of the hull damage sustained," said Capt. Windross Banton, from aboard his coast guard icebreaker vessel.

The boats became trapped when winds pushed ice inland toward the coast. Banton said this is the worst he's ever seen the ice.

For the seal hunters, who fish during other times of the year, it means lost profits and costly repairs. Banton estimates some will lose up to \$250,000.

There have been reforms of the seal hunt since the first pictures of white seal pups being clubbed to death horrified the public. Juvenile seals are no longer taken and there are rules ensuring the seals are dead when they are skinned. Canada's government says the hunt is now humane.

But opposition has not ended, and critics say the stranded fishermen represent a new reason to shut down the hunt.

"We're concerned for their safety," said Sheryl Fink, a senior researcher with International Fund for Animal Welfare, or IFAW. "Sealing is a very dangerous occupation with unpredictable conditions."

IFAW was founded in 1969 with the purpose of ending Canada's seal hunt.

This year, the Canadian government reduced the seal quota to 270,000, a decrease of about 20 percent, because melting ice has caused an increasing number of sea pups to drown.

The government of Newfoundland and Labrador says the industry is worth over \$55 million a year, and the income from sealing can account for 25 to 35 percent of a fisherman's annual income.

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