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Thursday, May 17, 2007

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### ANIMAL PROTECTION

## Stop inhumane seal slaughter

BY PATRICIA H. RAGAN  
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How remarkable that an Arctic bearded seal showed up in Florida, all the way from the waters north of Newfoundland. Though the seal did not survive, thank goodness he arrived in friendly territory where people rescued him and took him to get medical help.

Too bad that other Canadian seals aren't treated humanely. Maybe you remember the disturbing images, back in the 1980s, of baby seals being clubbed to death on the ice floes. The images faded from TV, but the cruelty continues. The spectacle is bigger and bloodier than ever. This spring, hundreds of thousands of baby seals were slaughtered in a hunt sanctioned and supported by the Canadian government.

#### Illegal in the U.S.

It is the largest commercial slaughter of marine mammals on the planet -- with Canadian fishermen having slaughtered more than one million baby seals over the past three years. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and other animal-protection groups have appealed to the Canadian government's sense of humanity in calling for an end to the hunt, to no avail.

Baby seals are targeted for their skins, which are sold to European and Asian fashion markets. Their bloody carcasses are left to rot on the ice because there are few markets for the meat. Further details on the hunt can be found at [www.protectseals.org](http://www.protectseals.org).

This hunt would be illegal in the United States. Here, seals are protected from hunting under our Marine Mammal Protection Act. In America, seals are defended and celebrated, not brutally slaughtered for fashion items.

In Canada, newborn seals can be legally killed as soon as they begin to shed their fluffy white coats -- as young as 12 days old. In 2006, the Canadian government allowed fishermen to club and shoot at least 354,344 seals in the North Atlantic -- almost all of them babies. Ninety-eight percent of the seals killed were three months old or younger, and veterinary reports indicate that many seals were skinned while conscious and able to feel pain. Many of the seals killed hadn't had their first swim or solid meal.

Canadian seal hunters are actually commercial fishermen who earn just a small fraction of their annual incomes from killing seals -- the remainder comes from seafood such as crab, shrimp and lobster.

To pressure Canada's fishing industry and government to stop the seal hunt, HSUS launched a boycott of Canadian seafood products in 2005.

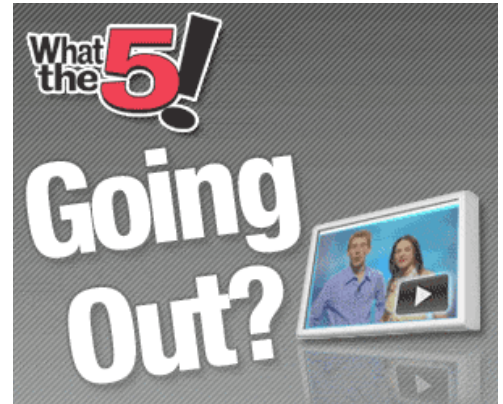
Already, more than 440,000 individuals and 2,000 businesses have pledged to avoid some or all Canadian seafood until the seal hunt ends. Participants include Legal Sea Foods, Whole Foods Markets, Wild Oats Markets and Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville Cafes.

#### Wondrous creatures

Fresh and most frozen seafood from Canada is clearly identified in grocery stores, so you can choose not to buy it. Restaurant patrons should ask if the seafood on the menu is from Canada, and if so, order something else or spend their dollars elsewhere.

Canada should treat its seals as the wondrous creatures that they are. As cruel and vicious as the slaughter of baby seals may be, it is within our power to stop it.

*Patricia H. Ragan is director of the Protectseals Campaign of The Humane Society of the United States.*




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