

Harpseals.org

Working to permanently end the annual Canadian harp seal slaughter



When the Ice is Stained Crimson

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The ice floes are startlingly white, until you get close enough. Then you see them—the fluffy white pups with big black eyes, calling for their mothers, who recognize their own babies among the herd by minute distinctions in their calls. No face says “innocence” more than theirs.

The image of the harp seal pup has graced millions of walls for over thirty years. That image awakened a world to an atrocity that no compassionate person could ignore. The outrage that resulted led to the ban on whitecoat seal pelt imports into Europe. A major victory, no doubt; but unfortunately, not enough to bring a permanent end to the annual massacre on the ice floes.

What this ban did accomplish was a major hit to the market for pelts (illegal in the U.S. since 1972). But the Canadian government’s response was calculated and eventually successful. The government worked with sealers to develop markets for the dense, grey pelts that keep the seal pups warm after they molt at 2 weeks of age. By the 1990’s, the seal pelt market was strong again. And the killing increased commensurately.

Rebecca Aldworth of HSUS was there in the spring, documenting this atrocity. In her journal entry from March 29th, she witnessed, “a clubbed baby seal is still conscious. She is writhing around on the ice in pain, moving her flippers. She lies next to another seal who has been killed, vacant eyes staring up, blood already frozen in the ice under her mouth...Across the ice floes, I hear panicked voices—there are more clubbed seals who are conscious and in agony. I run over to them, and see seals writhing around, breathing, and lifting their heads.”

One can feel hopeless reading about such horrors, but we can all take comfort in the fact that we now have a formidable strategy to stop the killing. And it depends on the actions of Americans. This strategy is the Canadian seafood boycott, and this boycott has been growing and growing over the past two years.

Harpseals.org has been building this boycott by encouraging seafood vendors to stop buying Canadian seafood and by reaching out to seafood consumers through the mass media and direct outreach. We know that this will succeed because the sealers are actually off-season fishermen and earn only a small percentage of their income from sealing. What’s more, the Canadian government has admitted that when the fishing industry withdraws its support of this slaughter, it will end. With Americans buying 70% of Canada’s seafood exports, the fate of the seals lies in our hands. Luckily, these are compassionate hands.