



Canadian Attitudes Towards the Commercial Seal Hunt - 2009 update.

IFAW Technical Briefing 2009-01
 Sheryl Fink
 25 February 2009

Introduction

In late 2008, IFAW commissioned Environics Research Group to include questions on Canada’s commercial seal hunt in its Focus Canada survey of Canadian public opinion. A total of 2021 interviews were conducted between 22 December 2008 and 2 January 2009, with a representative sample of adult Canadians. Questions were presented in French to respondents indicating that this was their first language. Responses are considered accurate to within 2.2%, 19 times out of 20.

Opposition to commercial sealing in Canada remains high

Opposition to Canada’s commercial seal hunt remains consistent with polls commissioned by IFAW earlier in 2008, with **6 in 10** Canadians with an opinion stating that they are opposed to Canada’s commercial sea hunt, and 4 in 10 saying they were strongly opposed.

These results are also consistent with those of another poll conducted by Ipsos Reid in April 2008, which found that only 4 in 10 Canadians supported the seal hunt.¹

Geographically, opposition to the hunt was above the national average in all regions except for Atlantic Canada (37%) and the prairies (48%).

Even in Atlantic Canada, 1 in 4 respondents with an opinion stated that they were “strongly opposed” to the commercial seal hunt.

Question: As you may know, there is currently a commercial seal hunt in Canada. Over the past four years more than one million seals have been hunted. Almost all of the seals killed were pups under three months of age. Do you support or oppose the commercial hunting of seals off Canada’s Atlantic coast? Would that be strongly or somewhat support/oppose?

Strongly Support	13%
Somewhat support	24%
Somewhat oppose	16%
Strongly oppose	38%
DK / NA	8%

¹An Ipsos Reid poll from April 2008 found that 52% of Canadians opposed the seal hunt (33% strongly, 19% somewhat, uncorrected figures). Available at <http://www.ipsosna.com/news/pressrelease.cfm?id=3889>

Opposition to government support for the seal hunt remains high

Opposition to government funding of the seal hunt remains high, with **68%** of those expressing an opinion saying they were opposed to the use of their tax dollars to support the commercial seal hunt.

Opposition to the use of public funds to support sealing was highest in Quebec (72%) and Vancouver (72%), with “strong” opposition to government funding in Vancouver polling at 7 points above the national average.

Question: Currently, the Canadian government spends tax dollars to support the commercial seal hunt. They do this by sending delegations abroad to lobby foreign governments and promote the seal hunt, by using icebreakers to provide access to seal herds to sealers, and by developing and marketing new products made from seals. Given the current global economic crisis, do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose the federal government using taxpayer dollars to support the commercial seal hunt?

Strongly Support	10%
Somewhat support	22%
Somewhat oppose	20%
Strongly oppose	45%
DK / NA	4%

Majority of Canadians want to see an end to the commercial seal hunt

When asked which statement was closest to their own, **61%** of those stating an opinion said that the seal hunt should be stopped completely (16%), or stopped but with an exception allowed for aboriginal people (45%).

Question: Which ONE of the following options is closest to your point of view on Canada’s commercial seal hunt? Should the seal hunt be...?

- **Expanded so more seals can be hunted**
- **Kept as it is today**
- **Stopped completely, or**
- **Should the commercial seal hunt be stopped, but aboriginal people be allowed to hunt seals for subsistence?**

Expanded so more seals can be hunted	5%
Kept as it is today	31%
Stopped completely	15%
Or, should the commercial seal hunt be stopped but aboriginal people be allowed to hunt seals for subsistence	42%
DK / NA	7%

The following questions were asked in an Environics Focus Canada Omnibus poll conducted in June 2008. These questions were not asked in the 2009 poll.

Canadians say “not with my taxes”

Canadians clearly do not approve of their taxpayer dollars being spent on support for the sealing industry.

Of those with an opinion, **78%** want government to stop spending money and effort on sealing, and concentrate on more important issues.

A full **73%** said they agreed with the statement that using government funds to support the seal hunt was a waste of tax dollars.

The end of commercial sealing is near

Canadians also seem to recognize that the end of Canada’s commercial seal hunt is inevitable, and the futility of continuing to bail out this dying industry with government funds , with almost two-thirds (**65%**) of respondents agreeing that the commercial seal hunt is an outdated industry that should be phased out.

When informed that the European Union was considering restricting trade in seal products, **72%** of Canadians agreed that this move by was a sign of the future and that the Government of Canada should end the seal hunt and invest in alternative employment opportunities for those affected.

Canadians would welcome the end of the commercial seal hunt

Although 4 in 10 Canadians say they support the seal hunt, only 2 in 10 say they would be upset if it ended. When asked how they would feel if Canada’s commercial seal hunt were ended, **81%** of Canadians indicated that they would not be upset, including **66%** who would be “not at all upset.”

Could you please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the following statements about Canada’s commercial seal hunt...

...The federal government should stop spending money and effort defending Canada's commercial seal hunt, and concentrate on more important issues instead.

Strongly Agree	53%
Somewhat Agree	22%
Somewhat Disagree	11%
Strongly Disagree	9%
DK / NA	4%

...Using government funds to support and promote Canada’s commercial seal hunt is a waste of your tax dollars.

Strongly Agree	50%
Somewhat Agree	19%
Somewhat Disagree	14%
Strongly Disagree	13%
DK / NA	4%

The commercial hunting of seals for their fur is an outdated industry that should be phased out.

Strongly Agree	44%
Somewhat Agree	18%
Somewhat Disagree	18%
Strongly Disagree	15%
DK / NA	4%

Canadians want alternatives to sealing

Canadians want the end of Canada's commercial seal hunt to be accompanied by support for the individuals who take part in this seasonal activity. An overwhelming **84%** of respondents agreed that the Canadian government should invest in employment programs so that people who now take part in the commercial seal hunt can find other kinds of work.

Conclusion

Public opinion in Canada clearly remains opposed to commercial sealing, and to the use of government funds to support the sealing industry.

Any measures taken by the Canadian government to bring an end to the commercial seal hunt, while providing alternative employment opportunities for those affected, would likely be strongly welcomed by the vast majority of Canadians.

A move by the European Union to ban seal products is a sign of the future. The Government of Canada should end the seal hunt and invest in alternative employment opportunities for those affected.

Strongly Agree	45%
Somewhat Agree	23%
Somewhat Disagree	14%
Strongly Disagree	13%
DK / NA	6%

The Canadian government should invest in employment programs so that people who now take part in the commercial seal hunt can find other kinds of work.

Strongly Agree	55%
Somewhat Agree	27%
Somewhat Disagree	7%
Strongly Disagree	8%
DK / NA	3%