Sealing in Nunavut: A Profile

- For thousands of years, seals have been a vital resource for Inuit survival in a very demanding environment. The seal is used for food, clothing, and arts and crafts. Very little is wasted. Seal hunting has always been a central foundation of Inuit culture, sustaining traditional sharing customs, a special knowledge of the seal resource and its ecosystem, and the passing on of skills and values from elders to youth.

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Principles of seal utilization in Nunavut include:

- Sustainable use
- Humane hunting practices
- Complete use of the animal

- The population of the ringed seal is in the order of 1.5-2 million. The current Inuit take is estimated at 30,000 animals per year, much less than historical levels and certainly less than the sustainable yield. Ringed seals do not occur in concentrated herds like the harp seal, and they do not migrate. They are widely distributed across their habitat in the circumpolar north. Ringed seals have never been endangered, and provisions for maintaining a sustainable harvest are central to the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board and the Nunavut Wildlife Act.
- The Inuit harvest of ringed seals in Nunavut is practiced on a small-scale and family-centered basis. The imputed (replacement) food value of ringed seals is estimated to be as high as $5 million in Nunavut, and seal continues to be one of the most valuable and preferred food sources.
- Seal skins are used first for domestic "home" use for clothing, arts and crafts. Surplus skins are sold commercially. Prices have increased steadily over the past 10 years as people in many parts of the world discover the beauty and utility of Nunavut ringed seal skins for fashion garments and other accessories.
- The cash value of seal skins as by-products of the hunt is important to hunters for financing the cost of harvesting supplies and equipment necessary to sustain land-based activities and expose Inuit youth to the traditional lifestyle. Social problems are the alternative, as is more dependence on unsustainable options.
- Any true and sustainable conservation initiative must respect a number of key issues: the critical balance of nature, the rights of sovereign nations, and the value of cultural diversity.
- Nunavut is a staunch supporter of animal-welfare legislation, but cannot accept the fund-raising rhetoric of radical animal-rights organizations in the name of true environmentalism. The animal-rights protest industry is part of the problem insofar as it misrepresents nature and alienates humankind from natural ecosystems. Environmentalism must be a science, not a fundamentalist religion that attacks other cultures and livelihoods.

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