

EN

EN

EN



COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Brussels, 23.7.2008
SEC(2008) 2291

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

Accompanying document to the

Proposal for a

REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL
concerning trade in seal products

SUMMARY OF THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

**ON THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF A BAN OF PRODUCTS
DERIVED FROM SEAL SPECIES**

{ COM(2008) 469 final }
{ SEC(2008) 2290 }

Executive Summary

1. In line with its commitment to high animal welfare standards, the European Commission undertook to conduct an objective, in-depth analysis of the animal welfare aspects of seal hunting in sealing countries. This report presents possible options with respect to further policy and/or legislative measures to address animal welfare concerns with regard to the killing and skinning of seals.
2. In the framework of this analysis, regulatory frameworks and management practices for seal hunting in the different range states were analysed¹ and, based on findings of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)², best practices were identified. The following range states were analysed in detail: Canada, Finland, Greenland, Namibia, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United Kingdom (Scotland).
3. The assessment showed that the seal hunt management systems differ between range states - and that within all systems improvements can be made. Seals are hunted in substantially different contexts. Both the type and size of the hunt, and the regulatory environments in which the hunts are taking place are different. Some range states have adopted and implemented comprehensive management systems aimed at minimising the conflict between production and animal welfare, whereas other range states' management systems are less well-developed and indicate less concern about animal welfare.
4. The EFSA scientific opinion indicates that seals can be killed rapidly and effectively, without causing avoidable pain, distress and suffering, using a variety of methods. However, there is reported evidence that in practice effective killing does not always happen and some animals are killed and skinned in a way, which causes avoidable pain, distress and other form of suffering.
5. Both, legislative and non-legislative policy measures were considered in the impact assessment. Furthermore, policy measures that are not linked directly to the management systems - such as a total prohibition of placing on the EU market or of imports/exports, as well as measures that could be linked to the good or bad practices of the seal hunt management systems were analysed.
6. The environmental dimension of the assessment is limited to the impacts of animal welfare aspects for seals which, however, are difficult to measure because the effectiveness of killing methods used for seals vary according to the methods used, the skill of the operators and the environmental conditions. Furthermore, economic impacts are limited to those to trade and local economies, both on the side of the sealing countries as well as of potential transit and transformation countries, while the social dimension touches mainly upon the conditions for the Inuit population.

¹ Commission study outsourced to the consultancy firm COWI "Assessment of the potential impact of a ban of products derived from seal species", April 2008

² EFSA independent scientific opinion on the animal welfare aspects of methods for the killing and skinning of seals, Dec. 2007: http://www.efsa.europa.eu/EFSA/efsa_locale-1178620753812_1178671319178.htm

7. **A total prohibition of placing on the EU market of seal products** is assessed to have minor economic impacts in EU Member States. This assumes, however, that transshipment of sealskins and other seal products and imports of sealskins for further processing and exports can continue. The impacts are assessed to be slightly more significant for non-EU range state. This is a result of the fact that the size of the seal hunts in these non-EU countries are much larger than in the EU range states, and that the EU market - apart for Russia - is of some importance. This option would also deny consumers the choice to purchase seal products in the EU.
8. **A total prohibition of imports and exports** would have medium economic impacts on the EU Member States, although those impacts could be significant for Finland and Germany, if such ban would also cover transit trade. The impacts would be slightly higher for the non-EU range states. This is again a result of the fact that the size of the seal hunts in non-EU countries is much larger than in the EU range states, and that the EU market - apart for Russia - is of some importance. However, if the ban is extended to transit trade Canada will in particular suffer, unless this trade can be shifted from Germany and Finland to outside of the EU e.g. Norway. Hence, Norway may actually strengthen its position as a transit trader. With regard to the consumer, he/she would only have a very limited choice of seal products derived from seal species hunted in the EU and offered for sale on local markets only.

Denmark and Italy are by far the two largest EU importers of raw fur skin from seal for further processing / sales on the EU market, and will thus also be affected by such regulation. Denmark imports the raw fur skins directly coming from Canada and Greenland (that are not categorised as goods in transit), while Italy imports the raw fur skins from Russia, Finland and the UK (Scotland). Greece also has a noticeable trade in raw skins originating in the two latter range states.

9. Benefits from **a labelling** system allowing consumers to distinguish between individual seal products on the basis of welfare considerations (product-based labelling) might include a price mark-up on the consumer market and at the same an increase of the image of seal hunting in general. If the system is voluntary it might encourage a natural self-selection process regarding compliance and thus maintain the balance between the animal welfare, economic and social dimension - i.e. those who pursue the label might benefit more than it costs, and the welfare of the seals could be enhanced. Furthermore, it is assessed that the impact will be largest if it is a widespread international labelling system rather than a specific EU system.
10. **Bi-/multilateral agreements** between the EU and one or more range states could be made, which could enlarge the geographical area not to be covered by any legislative measures. The impact will be similar to that of a limited ban that allows trade if the hunting of the seals complies with some established standards as discussed above.
11. Given the animal welfare concerns expressed by the public, notably by the European Parliament and Member States, stand-alone non-legislative measures are not considered sufficient to address the issue.

12. The EFSA scientific opinion clearly indicates that there is reported evidence that, in practice, effective killing does not always happen - which is reinforced by the further assessment findings. There are therefore reasonable grounds to consider undertaking precautionary steps to ensure that products derived from seals, which are killed and skinned in a way that causes them avoidable pain, distress and suffering, are denied access to the European market.
13. The outcome of the assessment of impacts in relation to the animal welfare, economic and social dimension shows that **a combination of several options** appears to be the best way to meet the overarching objectives, i.e.
- protect seals from acts that cause them avoidable pain, distress, fear and other forms of suffering during the killing and skinning process
 - address the concerns of the general public with regard to the killing and skinning of seals

This should be done through prohibiting the placing on the market and the import to transit through, or export from, the Community of all seal products. Trade in those products would however be possible when certain conditions, which concern the manner and method whereby seals are killed and skinned, are met. Information requirements would also need to be established aimed at ensuring that seal products whose trade would be possible by derogation to the prohibitions otherwise in force would be clearly indicated as coming from a country meeting the above-mentioned conditions.

This preferred option would help to ensure that the general public is not confronted anymore with those seal products derived from seals killed and skinned with avoidable pain, distress or other form of suffering and would seek to provide incentives for the use of killing and skinning methods of seals which do not cause avoidable pain, distress or other forms of suffering. In this way, the option would have a direct impact on the application in practice of animal welfare friendly hunting techniques and thus protect the animals from unnecessary suffering.