



Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

13th Meeting of HELCOM Expert Group on Marine Mammals

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Background

This document contains the policy position adopted in the General Assembly of CPMR (Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions) Baltic Sea Commission, 11 June 2019, Gdansk (Poland), regarding legalising trade in seal products from controlled hunting.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note of the information.



LEGALISING TRADE IN SEAL PRODUCTS FROM CONTROLLED HUNTING

To be approved by the CPMR Baltic Sea Commission General Assembly, 11 June 2019, Gdansk (PL)

Seals have been hunted historically for skin, fur, meat and fat, and they were an important source of income for people, particularly in the Northern Baltic Sea. Seals were also considered a nuisance due to their competition with fisheries, and hunting was encouraged. During the 1900s, bounties were even paid for hunting seals. A combination of hunting and environmental factors led to a dramatic decline in seal populations.

Since the 1970s and 1980s, seals are protected by all countries in the Baltic Sea Region. In 2009, an import and sale ban on seal products in the EU was introduced as a result of concerns for the welfare of seals. However, there was an exception for continued sales of seal products from culling within the EU.

In 2011, Canada and Norway initiated a dispute in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) against the EU as they considered the ban to be barriers to trade. The WTO Dispute Settlement Body concluded that the EU prohibition was permitted under current trade rules, but that the exception for continued sales from culling was discriminatory and therefore not compatible with WTO law. The EU implemented the WTO ruling and the exception was removed from 18 October 2015, despite an active effort by national governments and other actors to be able to maintain the exception. The only remaining exception to the EU ban is for seal products from hunting by indigenous peoples inside and outside the EU. Member countries must comply with the current regulation and is thus prevented from selling seal products.

The number of seals has increased, and today conflicts with human fishing activities have re-emerged in an increasing number of areas. As a result, controlled hunting is allowed for grey seals in Denmark, Estonia, Finland and Sweden, ringed seals in Finland and Sweden, and harbour seals in Denmark and Sweden. The highest permissible annual quota among these countries according to Helcom is around 2,000 grey seals, 230 ringed seals and 235 harbour seals combining information from all countries.

The CPMR Baltic Sea Commission urges the EU Commission and WTO to rethink the legislation from an ethical point of view. It is not reasonable to hunt seals and not utilise the body in a sustainable way by salvaging the remains for food and other products.



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The Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) brings together some 160 Regions from 25 States from the European Union and beyond.

Representing about 200 million people, the CPMR campaigns in favour of a more balanced development of the European territory.

It operates both as a think tank and as a lobby group for Regions. It focuses mainly on social, economic and territorial cohesion, maritime policies and accessibility.

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