

SCIENCE & ENVIRONMENT

Animal welfare group takes seal message on the road

BY NATALIE MACLELLAN

Giftshops in downtown Toronto are selling seal penises along with Mountie dolls and maple syrup as a typical Canadian souvenir. You can purchase your penis in a box tied with a gold bow — for \$650 a pop.

When did seal penises become such a part of Canadian culture? What exactly does that say about us?

Canada's reputation is being tarnished internationally because of the hunt, said Richard Smith of the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW).

Smith was here as part of a national tour in response to Newfoundland Fisheries Minister John Efford's recent national campaign in support of the seal hunt. Efford visited Dalhousie last month as part of this campaign.

"It's become by far the largest hunt in marine mammals anywhere in the world. It's certainly the second largest hunt for any animal anywhere in the world, only surpassed by the killing of kangaroos every year in Australia. It's truly a world class event. It shouldn't come as any surprise that the world is interested in this hunt," said Smith.

IFAW has launched a campaign against the commercial seal hunt, as well as any large scale commercial hunt "because of the overwhelming evidence that they deplete animal populations because such large scale enterprises are difficult to regulate and they result in unacceptable levels of cruelty."

IFAW does not object to subsistence hunting, or hunting for trade in local communities.

"If you want to compare it anecdotally, we don't have any problem with an Inuit elder going out to kill a ring seal for local consumption. We do have trouble with commercial seal hunting in Newfoundland going out and killing

500 animals in one day."

Smith focused on four main issues in the sealing controversy: the scapegoating of seals for the decline of the cod stocks, the per-pound meat subsidy offered by the federal government, the killing of male seals for their penises, and the attempt to restrict media access to the hunt.

In John Efford's recent tour, he regularly blamed the seal populations for the decline of the cod stocks, stating that the average seal eats one ton of fish a year.

IFAW insists that this is a myth and point to scientific documents which pinpoint overfishing as the cause of the fishery collapse.

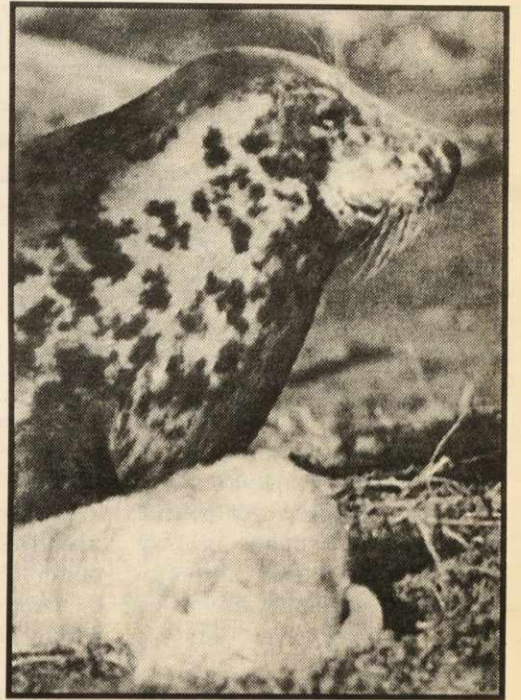
"There is a direct link between the collapse in the cod stocks and the re-

initiation of a lot of rhetoric about seals eating all the fish," said Smith. "Because the government did not follow the best advice from the scientists, did not curtail fishing efforts, they had to find a scapegoat to deflect attention away from their own management mistakes."

There was also the problem of the government subsidies of the hunt. According to a study by economist Clive Southey at the University of Guelph, the subsidies were three to four times larger than the actual market price of the processed meat.

"As of 1995, regardless of whatever market existed or didn't exist for seal meat, commercial sealers were guaranteed a certain amount of money for every pound of seal meat they brought back," Smith said. "And we know from a commercial fisheries report that a large percentage of this meat rotted when it got back to land."

A recent Angus Reid poll shows that public opinion is largely against the commercial hunt. 41 per cent of



Canadians didn't even know the commercial seal hunt was still going on in Canada. 75 per cent are against the government subsidization of the hunt. 82 per cent are against the hunting of seals for the purpose of selling their penises as aphrodisiacs.

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