

WHITE MEN have been hunting seals in what are now eastern Canadian waters since the early 1700's. Needless to say for anyone who watches television or reads newspapers, the practice has become extremely controversial in the past five or six years.

Young harp seals, three to four weeks old and still on the ice floes where they were born, are taken for their pelts and blubber (used by the margarine, soap, and cosmetic trades). They are killed with hardwood bats and skinned on the spot.

The sealing is done in the Gulf of St. Lawrence by Canadian sealers, and off the "Front" — the waters and islands off Labrador and eastern Newfoundland — by both Canadians and Norwegians.

Proponents say the harvesting, as it is called, is important to the local economies, useful for controlling the herds, and that clubbing is at least as humane as methods used for slaughtering domestic animals. Opponents say the hunting is detrimental to the ecology and unjustified because the pelts are for luxuries, not necessities, and that the clubbing is cruel.

The government of Canada, through the Department of Fisheries and Forestry, has responsibility for regulating the fishing industry, of which sealing is considered a part.

Government supervision actually began about

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six years ago, in reaction to pressure to stop the sealing, an official of the department said. Since then, he said, the supervision has improved each year. For several

years quotas have been enforced in the Gulf area, and last June the International Commission for the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries agreed for the first time on quotas for the catch in the Front area — largely as a result of Canadian initiatives.

The quota agreed on for the 1971 hunt (March 12 to April 24) was 245,000: 100,000 of that for large Canadian vessels; 100,000 for large Norwegian vessels; and 45,000 for landsmen.

There will be an annual review of the quotas, the Fisheries official said, adding that, "the department considers itself bound to follow the advice of its scientific advisors. The 1971 quotas were based on our best advice last June. Since then some scientists who advised us have said the quota should be lower."

On March 29, Mr. Jack Davis, Minister of Fisheries, said that an international task force is investigating "all aspects" of seal hunting and will recommend changes, if necessary. He said that next year's quota will be "greatly reduced."

For more government information on sealing, the Department of External Affairs has published a booklet called *The Atlantic Seal Fishery*, which is available from this office.

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