

Canada to Pursue WTO Consultations in Response to European Union's Seal Products Ban – 28 July 09

The Government of Canada is acting to protect the Canadian families and communities that will be hurt by the European Union's regulation to ban trade in seal products.

The Honourable Stockwell Day, Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, and the Honourable Gail Shea, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, announced today that the Government of Canada will request World Trade Organization (WTO) consultations on the seal products ban.

"I stated that the Government of Canada would launch a WTO challenge should a seal products trade ban not include an acceptable exemption, and today I am following through on that promise," said Minister Day. "I will continue to defend the right of Canadian sealers to provide a livelihood for their families as they have done for centuries, through a hunt that has repeatedly been proven to be humane, sustainable and lawful."

WTO consultations represent the first stage in the WTO dispute settlement process. Consultations provide the parties with an opportunity to resolve a dispute through formal discussions. If consultations fail to resolve the issue, the matter can be referred to a WTO dispute settlement panel.

On July 27, the European Council of Ministers adopted a regulation effectively banning the sale of seal products to the European Union. The legislation does not contain an exemption clause for humanely harvested seal products, and it specifically prohibits the marketing of products resulting from sustainable and humane commercial hunts. The Government of Canada views this as a violation of the EU's WTO commitments under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade.

"The scientific evidence is clear that the Canadian seal hunt adheres to rigorous standards of animal welfare," said Minister Shea. "Sealing provides crucial jobs in many Aboriginal, northern and coastal communities where other economic opportunities are often limited. By caving in to pressure from professional anti-seal-hunt lobby groups, the European Union has taken a short-sighted and irresponsible action that will hurt thousands of Canadians. Our government has consistently defended the rights of Canadian sealers to pursue a living and we will continue to use every tool at our disposal to protect their livelihoods from this unjustified and indefensible ban."

The new request for consultations is linked to an existing dispute. In July 2007, Canada launched WTO consultations with Belgium and the Netherlands on their respective seal product bans. Consultations were held on November 11, 2007. Those consultations did not resolve the matter, however, as both countries are members of the European Union. Canada will seek to resolve both matters through discussions with the European Commission.

Canada will be in a position to submit its request for consultations with the European Communities in the coming weeks, once the Canadian government has fully reviewed the final European Council of Ministers' decision.

Further information about the WTO dispute settlement process can be obtained from the WTO's link: http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/disp1_e.htm

For information on Canada's sealing industry, please visit Canada's 2009 Seal Hunt by following the link: <http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/media/seal-phoque/seal-phoque-eng.htm>

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