

## Should we change wilderness area legislation to support seal culling?

### A science perspective

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#### Major Points:

- Commercial hunting of native wildlife is generally incompatible with the mandate of wilderness areas, and should only be allowed under exceptional circumstances.
- Such circumstances could arise if hunting was required for wildlife management (example: overpopulation of deer, moose, or elephant threatening to degrade vegetation), or to remove non-native species.
- However, there are no documented negative effects of native seal colonies on wilderness areas, and their ecological value.
- A broader issue is the proposed culling of seals to enhance collapsed fisheries for cod and other groundfish.
- At present, there is no scientific basis for such a cull. Papers published by DFO and other scientific bodies show that both gray and harp seals cannot be implicated as a major factor in the collapse of groundfish stocks in Eastern Canada, nor in the slow recovery of groundfish.
- Gray seals in particular feed primarily on sand lance and redfish, cod makes up a small part of their diet.
- New research shows that seals may even support the recovery of groundfish, by feeding on certain forage fishes that destroy cod larvae.
- In conclusion, a commercial hunt for seals does not represent a wildlife management issue, but solely a commercial interest, and should not be allowed in a wilderness area.
- The lack of a market for gray seal skins further undermines the argument for such a hunt.

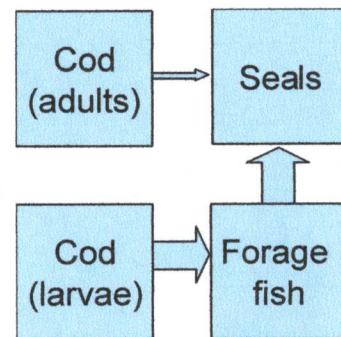
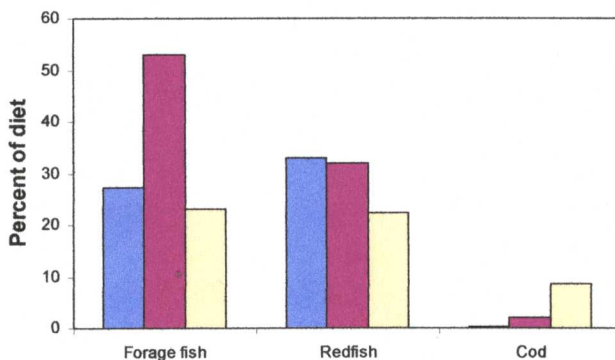


Figure: Diet of grey seals (blue=male, red=female, white=juvenile) from fatty acid analysis (after Beck et al. 2007, *Journal of Animal Ecology* Vol. 76, page 490) and feeding relationships of seals with cod and forage fish. Note that heavy feeding of seals on forage fish helps to improve survival of cod larvae.