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MEPs adopt strict conditions for the placing on the market of seal products in the European Union

The placing on the market of seal products should not be allowed say MEPs. It is permitted only where the seal products result from hunts traditionally conducted by Inuit and other indigenous communities. Otherwise the import is permitted where it is of an occasional nature and consists exclusively of goods for the personal use of the travellers.

Furthermore it is allowed to place on the market products that result from by-products of hunting [and] conducted for the purpose of sustainable management of marine resources on a non-profit basis.

Conditions for placing on the market

The placing on the market of seal products shall be allowed only where the seal products result from hunts traditionally conducted by Inuit and other indigenous communities and which contribute to their subsistence. These conditions shall apply at the time or point of import for imported products.

The legislative report which has been agreed with the Council in first-reading has been drawn up by Diana **WALLIS** (ALDE, UK). The legislative resolution was adopted with 550 votes in favour, 49 against and 41 abstentions.

The Regulation establishes harmonised rules concerning the placing on the market of seal products. It is therefore without prejudice to other Community or national rules regulating the hunting of seals.

By way of derogation from the above:

(a) the import of seal products shall also be allowed where it is of an occasional nature and consists exclusively of goods for the personal use of the travellers or their families. The nature and quantity of such goods may not be such as to indicate that they are being imported for commercial reasons;

(b) the placing on the market shall also be allowed for seal products that result from by-products of hunting that is regulated under national law and conducted for the sole purpose of sustainable management of marine resources. Such placing on the market shall only be allowed on a non-profit basis. The nature and quantity of such products shall not be such as to indicate that they are being placed on the market for commercial reasons.

Definition of Inuit

Press release

"Inuit" means indigenous members of the Inuit homeland – i.e. those arctic and subarctic areas where, presently or traditionally, Inuit have Aboriginal rights and interests – recognized by Inuit as being members of their people and includes Inupiat, Yupik (Alaska), Inuit, Inuvialuit (Canada), Kalaallit (Greenland) and Yupik (Russia)

Penalties

Member States will lay down the rules on penalties applicable to infringements of this Regulation and shall take all measures necessary to ensure that they are implemented. The penalties provided for shall be effective, proportionate and dissuasive.

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MEPs point out that the existence of those diverse legal requirements may further discourage consumers from buying products not made from seals, but which may not be easily distinguishable from similar goods made from seals, or products which may include elements or ingredients obtained from seals without this being clearly recognisable, such as furs, Omega-3 capsules and oils and leather goods.

Entry into force

This Regulation shall enter into force on the 20th day following that of its publication in the Official Journal of the European Union.

The article on conditions for placing on the market enters into force nine months from the date of entry into force of this Regulation.

Debate in plenary Monday 4 May

Diana **Wallis** (ALDE, UK) rapporteur said: "Seals are very beautiful marine animals – in fact, I have realised during this process that they have great PR – but to some they are the rats of the sea. That is how they are perceived by many fishermen: an adult seal gets through an enormous amount of fish on a daily basis. Therefore, there will remain the need for seals to be hunted to ensure the sustainability of fisheries in some area."

But what we have not done here is to regulate hunting. If people in any of our Member States wish to hunt, they can still continue to hunt. What they cannot do is take commercial gain from the results of that hunt. But it should be the case that the results of the hunt can be used, and I hope particularly that those parts of seals that can be used by the medical community will be able to be used."

Malcolm **Harbour** (EPP-ED, UK) said: "I think this is a call for action. What people have indicated so far is that this is the beginning of a process and not an end. The issue is the inhumane way in which seals are being killed and the inability of the professional hunters to deal with it. I think the Canadian Government has to reflect on that as well. There are plenty of review clauses built in here to ensure this works. I think the exemptions are well balanced because firstly they reflect the importance of supporting traditional hunting in communities."

Arlene **McCarthy** (PES, UK) said: "The USA has had a ban for many years, Mexico has banned the trade; in Europe we already have national bans in Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Italy; Germany and the UK are considering ways to ban the trade; bans are now in place in Russia; Hong Kong is planning a ban. This is a political issue that now has its time. After a 40 year campaign against the trade, Europe has the chance to introduce a ban in all 27 states. This year 50 000 seals have been slaughtered that Canadians hunt compared to 220 000 last year. That means that we as citizens have now the opportunity to ban this cruel trade. I know that this will be applauded by the citizens of Europe."

Caroline **Lucas** (Greens/EFA, UK) said: "Today, nearly one million seals are slaughtered annually in commercial seal kills around the world, and when we vote on this package tomorrow, we will be helping to end one of the most vile examples of animal cruelty."

Press release

Avril **Doyle** (EPP-ED, IE) said: "This has been a difficult debate, often emotional, with the heart ruling the head on many occasions. Great progress has been made in the survival and quality of life of cardiac patients by using the aortic, pulmonary and pericardial tissue of harp seals, the assumption being that they are sustainably hunted or killed and not in a cruel way. I would like assurances on ongoing medical research and bioprosthesis use of products from seals in the context of the compromise".

Background

According to EC proposal, Denmark and Italy are by far the two largest importers of raw fur skin from seal for further processing/sales on the Community market, and will thus also be affected by such regulation. Denmark imports the raw fur skins directly coming from Canada and Greenland (that are not categorised as goods in transit), while Italy imports the raw fur skins from Russia, Finland and **the UK (Scotland)**. Greece also has a noticeable trade in raw skins originating in the two latter range states.

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