

:

Italy stands up against cruel seal hunt

13 February 2006

IFAW delighted by growing momentum to shut down European markets for seal skin products

(Rome/Brussels - 13 February 2006) – Italy has temporarily suspended the import of seal skins and seal derived products. The Italian Vice-Minister for Trade and Industrial Affairs, Adolfo d’Urso, - together with the leading Italian animal welfare NGO LAV [1] - confirmed today at a press conference in Rome that no import licences would be granted in the coming months. At the same time, the MP Saia announced a legislative proposal (supported by the government coalition) to prohibit the commerce in seal skins and seal derived products. The proposal is designed to complement the existing import ban on cats and dogs fur.

Lesley O’Donnell, Director of IFAW’s European Office said: “We are delighted by Minister Urso’s decision. It illustrates the growing momentum in Europe to shut down the markets for seal products. The important legislative efforts in Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Mexico (see below in the notes to the editor) will contribute towards putting an end to the cruel and unjustifiable massacre of seals. We call on other European Governments to follow these promising examples.”

The 2006 Canadian seal hunt, which is due to start in late March, looks to be bigger than ever. Over the last three years, the government quota of 975,000 seals killed has even been exceeded. The new quota have not yet been fixed. In November 2005, however, Canada discussed at a stakeholder consultation meeting [2] a draft proposal for a five-year management plan, which could range from 1,250,000 to 1,750,000 seals to be killed.

Italy with its fur industry is one of the most important markets for seal pelts in Europe and a big importer of seal oil products. Moreover, Italy is also an important gateway by which seal products are imported and then re-exported to other countries.

[1] Anti-Vivisection League (LAV), www.infolav.org

[2] Seal Forum, November 2005

Note to editors:

- In 2003, the **Canadian Government** decided to permit the killing of 975,000 seals over three years. The number of seals reported killed over this period is 985,312. This means that 10,312 more seals were killed than permitted in the quota. In Canada, harp seals above about 12 days of age can be legally hunted. Most of the seals killed are under the age of three months. The life expectancy of harp seals is around 30 years.

- **Update on national seal bans:**

- **January 2006:**

- o Mexico bans the import and export of all marine mammals (i.e. including seals) and their derived products (similar to the US Marine Mammal Protection Act from 1972).

- o Greenland instructs its public state company not to trade in seal pelts originating from the Canadian seal hunt.

- **December 2005:** The Dutch Parliament initiated a legislative proposal to ban the import/export and marketing of harp and hooded seals and their derived products. The proposal is expected to be debated in the Parliament in the coming months.

- **May 2004:** The Belgian Government adopts a legislative proposal to ban the import/export and marketing of all seal products. After notification with the European Commission and WTO, the proposal is due to be presented to the Belgian Parliament.

- The **European Union** introduced in 1983 a ban on seal products derived from whitecoats (newborn harp seals, less than 12 days old) and bluebacks (young hooded seals, less than one year old). Unfortunately, this ban is not effective in order to stop the current trade of harp and hooded seal pelts in Europe. Today, seals are hunted when they are just a few days older and their pelts can therefore be legally traded in the EU.

- The **United States** introduced in 1972 the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), which prohibits the import/export and marketing of marine mammal products (i.e. including seal derived products). The law also applies to live marine mammals.

- The **Council of Europe** adopted in 2004 a Motion for a Resolution (initiated by the Italian MP Azzolini) to stop the commercial hunt of seals and called on its Member States to introduce national bans on seal derived products. The Assembly also debated a report produced by the Italian MP Nessa, which criticised the cruelty of the hunt. The report will be voted on in April 2006.