

P.E.I. reaction swift to seal cull recommendation

Seals cost P.E.I. fishermen \$10 million every year in lost catches and damaged gear

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10

People on Prince Edward Island have reacted swiftly to news that the Senate standing committee on fisheries and oceans has recommended a seal cull in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.



Reaction came quickly on P.E.I. to the grey seal cull recommendation. (Pierres-Ives Daoust)

Mike McGeoghegan, president of the P.E.I. Fishermen's Association, says it's good news for fishermen because it's action they have been seeking for years.

"Should have been done 15 years ago ... now they're starting to take notice of what we're saying," McGeoghegan said.

The recommendations are aimed at helping to restore cod stocks, but Island fishermen argue that the growing grey seal herd is eating all kinds of fish, including herring and lobster.

McGeoghegan said seals cost fishermen \$10 million each year in lost catches and damaged gear.

"It's frustrating. Years ago, we never had any problem with seals; this is a new problem," he said.

"It's either they have, you know, this cull, or we have to get a couple killer whales and put them in the Strait."

The Senate committee recommends that 70,000 grey seals be culled — that's about 70 per cent of the population in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Financial incentive

Seal hunters already can kill up to 60,000 grey seals every year, but few hunters do because there's not much of a market for them.

The Senate committee's recommendation would introduce an incentive, as hunters would be paid by the government.

But at least one P.E.I. marine expert disagrees with the recommendation for a cull.

"It would be important to use caution and, again, proceed in a more gradual manner," said Pierre-Yves Daoust, a wildlife pathology professor at the Atlantic Veterinary College in Charlottetown.

"Unfortunately, the fishing industry may not have the patience."

Daoust said it's important that the animals be killed in a humane way. He added that the government needs to establish a market for grey seals — something that could take a long time.

"I think we will not be able to establish a market for thousands of animals in the first year, or even the first few years," he said.

The Senate recommends the cull to start next year and continue over four years. The recommendations still need to be approved by the federal fisheries minister.