

## **Consumers on a Mission to Stop the Canadian Seal Hunt: A Qualitative Study of an Ongoing Boycott**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Despite growth in consumer boycotts, marketing has paid little attention. This study investigates the contentious Canadian Seafood Boycott to determine boycott motivation and whether this boycott will be effective (i.e., stimulate consumer participation) and successful (i.e., convince the Canadian Government to completely ban seal hunting). Netnography was used to analyze consumer comments submitted to an online hunting ban petition. Petition signatories are generally very angry about the Canadian Seal Hunt and boycott for a variety of objectives (instrumental, expressive, and punitive). To date, the boycott has been effective; considering the growing number of signatories, it is moving toward success.

## INTRODUCTION

It has been stated that “boycotts of businesses are reaching epidemic proportions in America largely because they are so successful” (Anonymous 1990, online). Accordingly, it is not surprising that Friedman (1999) reports that business leaders generally perceive boycotts as the most effective technique that consumers have at their disposal to impact company policies. He further observes that international boycotts have experienced the highest growth rate among all types of boycotts. This is mainly due to the increasing internationalization of environmental and social issues which have led nongovernment organizations (NGOs)—which are defined as nonprofit organizations that “combine resource mobilization, information provision, and activism to advocate for changes in certain issue areas” (Spar and La Mure 2003, 79)—to globalize their efforts. It is also due to consumers becoming increasingly concerned with the impact of consumption on our environment and on society at large (Shaw, Newholm, and Dickinson 2006). Therefore, recent boycotts have been focusing on issues affecting the environment and the lives of animals, women, and gay and lesbian individuals (Friedman 1999). Further, consumers who participate in a boycott have been found to embrace, either explicitly or implicitly, a voting metaphor that turns consumption into the expression of their ethical and political convictions (Shaw et al. 2006).

John and Klein (2003) point out that despite this growth in both the number of boycotts and the number of consumers participating in them, marketing has not been paying a lot of attention to boycotts and consumer boycott behavior. Ettenson and Klein (2005) find that due to the lack of empirical research, managers often have very little understanding of consumer protest behavior, including boycott behavior. Nevertheless, there appears to be a body of accumulated knowledge about boycotts and boycott dynamics that should be of interest to marketers. Boycotts

have been identified as a form of consumer behavior congruent with the marketing concept (Klein et al. 2004). In other words, boycott targets have obviously neglected their focus on researching and understanding their consumers, and therefore severely fail to satisfy customer needs and wants; consequently, consumers feel compelled to use boycotts to communicate an extreme degree of dissatisfaction and displeasure to the boycott target by withholding their dollar votes. As such, boycotts can be viewed as “an extreme case of a broader category of consumer behavior in which social and ethical issues, such as environmentalism, influence purchasing decisions” (Klein et al. 2004, 92).

Currently, there are a number of ongoing consumer boycotts, but none seems to be as controversial and heated as the Canadian Seafood Boycott which began on March 29, 2005—the first day of the spring seal hunt that year (Scandinavian Anti-Sealing Coalition 2007). Here we see the Canadian Government (CBC News 2006b; CTV.ca 2007a) and much of the Canadian press (MSNBC News Services 2004) pitched against many of the world’s animal welfare and rights organizations (Boycott Canadian Seafood 2007), international politicians and governments (Senate Resolution 118 2007; The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 2006), a growing number of celebrities (Zeit 2007) as well as an increasing number of consumers around the globe who have pledged to participate in the boycott to force the Canadian Government—and those Canadian fishermen who hunt seals to supplement their incomes—to end the seal hunt for good. For example, on August 6, 2007, the search term “Canada seal hunt” resulted in 1.5 million hits on *Google*; the search term “petition Canada to stop the seal hunt” showed 193,000 hits, and the search term “pledge to boycott Canadian seafood” still showed 60,800 results.

Consequently, the purpose of this investigation is to investigate what drives consumers to boycott and to determine whether the Canadian Seafood Boycott is likely to be effective (i.e.,

stimulate participation from consumers) as well as successful (i.e., convince the Canadian Government to outlaw the hunt of all seals permanently) (Garrett 1987; John and Klein 2003).

## **BOYCOTT LITERATURE**

### **BOYCOTTS AS DRIVERS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE**

Miller et al. (1992) note that the first U.S. consumer boycott can be traced back to the Boston Tea Party when colonists tried to “turn economic clout into political power” (Glickman 2005, online). Boycotts have played an important role in the political culture of the U.S. ever since, because consumers have realized that they can use their “organized purchasing power” to better their own personal lives as well as those of others (Glickman 2005, online). In other words, boycotts are moral acts (Smith 1987), drivers of social justice in the U.S. and are very often used to improve the lives of the “seemingly powerless” (Friedman 1999, 225).

Consequently, it is not surprising that over 40% of Fortune 50 companies may be boycott targets at any given time (John and Klein 2003).

### **BOYCOTT DYNAMICS**

John and Klein define “a boycott as occurring when a number of people abstain from purchase of a product, at the same time, as a result of the same egregious act or behavior, but not necessarily for the same reasons” (2003, 1198). This egregious act or behavior does not necessarily have to directly impact the physical wellbeing of the potential boycotter (e.g., harmful health effects from water or air pollution); a consumer might decide to boycott because the target is causing harm or injustice to a third party (e.g., a firm using child labor, or an organization harming animals). Any increase in egregiousness is likely to increase boycott participation (John and Klein 2003). Further, the more emotional and self-explanatory the egregious act, the higher boycott participation (Hickman 2005). Interestingly, if a consumer

believes that the act/behavior of an organization is egregious, the purchase of the boycotted product might trigger feelings of guilt because a purchase can be seen as supporting the boycott target and the egregious act. These feelings can increase boycott participation and further cause a consumer to continue with the boycott (John and Klein 2003). In addition, the higher a consumer's financial contribution to the NGO advocating the boycott, the more likely the consumer will refrain from purchasing any of the target's products (Innes 2006).

A boycott can be considered effective if there is participation, no matter how small, and it is considered successful if the boycott target ceases the egregious act or behavior. Generally, the more effective a boycott, the more successful it is likely to be (Garrett 1987; John and Klein 2003). It is obvious that the reaction of the boycott target directly affects the boycott's success, but it also can influence the boycott's effectiveness because the target's response to the confrontation has the potential to kindle publicity that focuses on the issue (Clouder and Harrison 2005). Even though some targets yield to the NGO's demands and thus may be able to prevent the boycott from being launched, others respond in a manner that is considered insufficient or even insulting, and thus, in effect, aid the NGO in the recruitment of new members to the cause (Clouder and Harrison 2005). However, the more the target is committed to the behavior or policy in question, the higher the target's level of resistance, even though the boycott might reduce its profitability and harm its image (Garrett 1987). As Innes (2006) points out, if neither NGO nor the boycott target are willing to compromise, a boycott can continue indefinitely.

## A TREND TOWARD CONSUMER EMPOWERMENT AND SOVEREIGNTY

The Internet has turned into a very cost-effective and quick way of educating millions of consumers about boycotts. Therefore, it does not seem surprising that by 2005, almost two thirds of U.S. consumers state that they participate in at least one boycott per year (Glickman 2005),

and the trend seems to continue. Pires, Stanton, and Rita (2006, 938) find that the widespread adoption of information and communication technologies “is enabling an uncontrolled growth of consumer empowerment,” since it has turned “information scarcity” into “information democracy” or “transparency.” This ease of securing information has empowered consumers to hold companies accountable for their egregious acts and/or force organizations to change their behavior, and has therefore led to an increase in consumer sovereignty (Klein et al. 2004), which has been defined “as the power of consumers to determine, from among the offerings of producers of goods and services, what goods and services are and will be produced and capitalized” (Shaw et al. 2006, 1052). As such, consumer sovereignty can be understood as the degree of authority consumers can exert in a market. Further, largely due to high levels of competition in many consumer product markets (Smith 1987) and the proliferation of virtual communities (Kozinets 1998), the level of authority consumers may exercise in these markets is substantial. Interestingly, even as this widespread dissemination of information and the tremendous growth in virtual communities in combination with the increase in economic globalization, de-regulation, and competition has led to a proliferation of consumer sovereignty, the sovereignty of national governments and individual businesses have simultaneously been reduced (Harrison 2005).

## THE POTENTIAL COSTS OF CONSUMER BOYCOTTS

Gelb (1995) concludes that boycotts can be very expensive to the target. Recent examples of the high cost of consumer boycotts are easily found. In the UK boycott targets lost £3.2 billion in 2004, which reflects an increase of £600 million over the previous year; this increase was due to consumer anger at the U.S. over the Iraq war, anger that hit U.S. companies as surrogate boycott targets (Hickman 2005). While U.S. companies suffered in Europe, French companies

doing business in the U.S. did not fare any better. U.S. consumers were apparently so angry about France's refusal to join the war against Iraq that they decided to boycott French wines (Chavis and Leslie 2007). The boycott was so powerful that it lowered weekly sales by 26% during its peak, and by approximately 13% during the six months the boycott lasted, leading to a total loss of \$112 million.

Even though Spar and La Mure (2003) agree that boycott targets usually fold because of the implicit threat of financial losses, they assert that organizations also need to consider the damage to their reputation that a boycott can cause. It is worth noting that brand image is harmed not only among boycotters, but also non-boycotters even though they might not be ready to take action. Klein et al. (2004) consider this indirect effect to be potentially much more harmful to an organization in the long run than the direct loss of sales. For example, in 1998 Nike yielded to boycotters' demands because founder Phil Knight found that after seven years of boycotts, "the Nike product has become synonymous with slave wages, forced overtime, and arbitrary abuse. I truly believe the American consumer doesn't want to buy products made under abusive conditions" (Spar and La Mure 2003, 91).

## BOYCOTT FUNCTIONS/OBJECTIVES

Boycott actions differ in terms of their function or objective (Friedman 1999; John and Klein 2004). Even though NGOs generally call and organize boycotts to force the boycott target to change its behavior (i.e., instrumental boycotts), NGOs could conceivably call boycotts to simply vent frustration with their target (i.e., expressive boycotts) or to punish the boycott target (i.e., punitive boycotts) for having taken actions that are irreversible (Friedman 1999). Although consumer participation in boycotts can be categorized by the same functions, we agree with John and Klein (2003) that consumer boycott actions can be more complex than those of NGOs.

Accordingly, we extend Ettenson and Klein's reasoning (2005) by suggesting that for individual consumers these three boycott objectives are not necessarily independent of each other and that, consequently, consumers can boycott for any or all of these three reasons. Of course, consumers can opt to participate in an instrumental, expressive, or punitive boycott organized by an NGO and share the NGO's view on what function the boycott is to fulfill. Consumers, however, also have the option to participate, for example, in a boycott that the NGO advocates to be instrumental, whereas consumers—in addition to wanting the target to change the egregious behavior—may also want to express their frustration and/or to punish the target for committing an irreversible action in the first place. In the case of the Canadian Seafood Boycott, we expect that consumers participate for any or all of these three reasons; they are angry that the Canadian Government is allowing and supporting the seal hunt and thus they want to express their anger; they further want to punish the Canadian Government, the fishermen participating in the seal hunt, and Canadian fish-processing plants for killing the seals, which are irreversible acts; and most importantly, they want to coerce the Canadian Government into permanently outlawing the commercial hunt.

## BOYCOTT CLASSIFICATIONS

Boycotts can be classified as either surrogate boycotts or nonsurrogate boycotts (Friedman 1999). In a nonsurrogate or direct boycott the boycott target is the party that is committing the egregious behavior. In the case of the Canadian Seafood Boycott, the direct targets are the approximately 6,000 fishermen who participate in the annual seal hunt as an off-season activity and the companies who purchase and process the pelts (Klapper 2007). In a surrogate boycott, also called transformational boycott, the party that is committing the egregious behavior may not be accessible to the boycotter, and therefore surrogate organizations are being

targeted instead. However, it is possible—as in the case of the Canadian Seafood Boycott—that surrogate boycotts are organized to lend support to nonsurrogate boycotts. Surrogate boycotts might be instrumental, because the surrogate target is expected, in an effort to alleviate financial damage and image problems, to pressure the offending party into changing the egregious behavior. In case of the Canadian Seafood Boycott, the most important instrumental surrogate boycott target is the Canadian tourism industry (Friends of Animals 2006). Moreover, a number of consumers have pledged to boycott all Canadian products (Kangas 2005).

Boycotts can also be classified as either primary or secondary (Friedman 1999). Secondary boycotts are targeted at organizations, normally retailers, which purchase the products of the offending party (i.e., the primary boycott target) for the specific purpose of reselling these products to the end consumer. The goal of secondary boycotts is to force retailers to discontinue the sale of products produced by the offending party. In case of the Canadian Seafood Boycott, secondary surrogate boycott targets are those that purchase large amounts of Canadian seafood such as Red Lobster (Mervine 2005). The owner of Red Lobster, the Darden Group, started feeling consumer wrath on June 25, 2005, as thousands of consumers went to their local Red Lobster restaurants to appeal the company to stop buying seafood from companies involved in the seal hunt (HSUS 2005). Even though Red Lobster refuses to join the Canadian Seafood Boycott, it addresses the issue on its website where it tries to reassure customers that “Red Lobster is not involved in the seal hunt in any way and does not buy or sell seal products. In fact, we don’t buy any products at all from Newfoundland” (Darden Restaurants 2007, online). Apparently, neither NGOs nor consumers accept this explanation; the boycott continues to date and a *Google* search with the term “Red Lobster and Canada Seafood Boycott” results in 134,000 hits on September 28, 2007.

Some organizations can actually be classified as both a primary and a secondary boycott target. For example, COSTCO is a secondary boycott target because it is apparently selling seal oil capsules in its Atlantic Canada location. Both NGOs and consumers want the company to discontinue doing so (CBC News 2006a, Hodges 2007). The company is also a primary target because it has been accused of selling products in Canada that it would not be allowed to sell in the U.S. A number of NGOs and consumers believe that as a U.S. company, COSTCO should have to respect U.S. laws—specifically the U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 that does not allow the trade in products derived from marine mammals (The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 2006)—even in its foreign business dealings (Canadiansealhunt.com 2007; Hodges 2007; Sea Shepherd News 2006). A *Google* search using the term “Costco and Canada Seafood Boycott” brings 89,500 results on September 28, 2007.

## **THE FIRST SEAL WAR—A MARKETING COMMUNICATION BATTLE**

### **COMMERCIAL SEALING IN CANADA**

There are five nations that currently allow the hunt of seals for commercial purposes, namely Norway, Russia, Greenland, Namibia, and Canada; and all of these hunts have been controversial (for more detail please see appendix A). The species that are hunted in Canada include harp seals, hooded seals, harbor seals, ringed seals, bearded seals, and grey seals. However, the Northwest Atlantic harp seal appears to be the most abundant seal species in Atlantic Canada and therefore the major target of the annual seal hunt (Fisheries and Aquaculture Management 2002). Even though harp and hooded seals in Canada can commercially be hunted from November 15 to May 15, the majority of sealing normally begins in early March and extends to May 15. The hunt usually begins in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence, moves on to the northern Gulf, and then in the beginning of April to an area off Newfoundland and Labrador

that is called the “Front” where about 70% of the seals are killed (CBC News 2007c; CTV.ca 2007a; Fisheries and Aquaculture Management 2002). It is this spring season that attracts most of the attention and is generally referred to as the Canadian Seal Hunt. The only tools permitted for killings seals are high-powered rifles, shotguns firing slugs, hakapiks (i.e., a special type of club permitted for the killing of seals) and clubs. Sealers in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and on Quebec’s Lower North Shore reportedly prefer the use of mostly rifles and hakapiks; whereas sealers on the Front seem to rely primarily on rifles (Fisheries and Aquaculture Management 2007). On average, about 95% of the seals killed per year are beaters, which are seal pups approximately three weeks to one year of age. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) (2005) estimates that of these young seals, about 5% are *struck and lost* (i.e., either clubbed or shot but able to get away); whereas the struck-and-lost estimate for adult seals is much higher at 50%. In 2006, the total allowable catch (TAC) was 335,000 (Spiegel Online 2007d) and it was set at 270,000 for 2007. Due to early ice melt that led to the drowning of an estimated 100,000 harp seal pups in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence (Glendenning 2007; Spiegel Online 2007c) as well as boats being locked in by pack ice that was blown into the Front by “harsh northeasterly winds” (Spiegel Online 2007b; Taylor 2007a), the landed number of seal pelts was reported at 215,000 even though the hunting season was extended by almost six weeks to June 23 (IFAW 2007a).

## THE FIRST SEAL WAR

The first evidence of an international movement protesting the seal hunt can be traced back to the 1955 hunt. That year, Drs. Harry Lillie and Joseph Cunningham traveled to the ice with the sole purpose of documenting the seal hunt on film (Watson 2003). This was the first time sealers were officially accused of skinning seals alive (Watson 2003), a charge that has

accompanied sealing ever since. Since the film produced by Drs. Cunningham and Lillie did not reach the masses, events unfolding in 1964 mark the “official” beginning of the anti-sealing movement (Zeit 2007, online). The production company Artek was commissioned by the Quebec Government and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) to produce a film with the goal of attracting tourists to the area. By a strange twist of fate, Artek decided to focus on the seal hunt to give viewers an idea about the rough live of sealers (Watson 2003). The film, *Les Phoques* (The Seals), also included “a scene in which a seal is skinned alive and its carcass left flailing on the ice” (Canadian Geographic 2007, online). Shortly after *Les Phoques* was filmed, Peter Lust, editor of the German-language weekly newspaper *Montrealer Nachrichten* (Montreal News), was able to secure a copy of the film. His article *Murder Island*, denouncing the seal hunt, was published in 1964, and reprinted by over 300 newspapers (Watson 2003; Zeit 2007). As the film made its way across Europe and the United States, public outcry was immense and brought anti-hunt expeditions to the ice with the goal of ending the seal hunt. The Canadian Government responded by establishing steep fines for those who interfered with the seal hunt. Further, the government impounded ships and helicopters belonging to members of the anti-sealing movement, and arrested and imprisoned protesters (Lee 1989). The Canadian Government also passed the first regulations addressing the exploitation and humane killing of seals (Zeit 2007). These so-called Seal Protection Regulations regulated the quota, the dates of the hunt, killing methods, as well as requiring the licensing of sealers, vessels, and aircrafts (Canadian Geographic 2007).

From 1974 to 1976, the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW)—which was founded in 1969 for the specific purpose of ending the seal hunt—employed an ad agency to create the media campaign “Stop the Seal Hunt” (Zeit 2007). The “sophisticated” campaign

featured French actress Brigit Bardot who condemned the killing of seal babies, and came at a price tag of \$1 million CAD (Malling 1978, online). In 1976, the anti-sealing movement was joined by the Greenpeace Foundation (Canadian Geographic 2007) when Paul Watson, one of the co-founders, brought 14 members of the Foundation to the ice to stop the hunt (Sea Shepherd Conservation Society 2006). Refusing to change, the Newfoundland Government instead announced plans for an international campaign that was intended to defend the seal hunt. The cost of that campaign was \$1 million CAD (Malling 1978). In the beginning of 1978, Newfoundland Premier Frank Moore, trying to portray sealing in a more positive light, traveled Canada, the U.S. and Europe, accompanied by a panel of scientists and government experts. Despite these efforts, IFAW was winning the media war (Malling 1978). In 1982, the European Parliament voted to ban seal pup pelts from Canada. The European Community banned the import of whitecoat (harp seal pup) and blueback (hooded seal pup) pelts in 1983 (Yeld 2001). Considering that the European Community used to import 75% of all Canadian seal pelts, the market collapsed (Canadian Geographic 2007). Immediately after the European Community announced the ban, a seafood boycott organized by the IFAW began in Great Britain (Canadian Geographic 2007; CBC Archives 1984) and was extended to the United States in late 1984/1985 (Best 2004). Being worried about the damage such a large-scale boycott would inflict on the fishing industry, fish products manufacturers urged an end to the seal hunt. These requests were supported by the fisheries ministers of both Newfoundland and Nova Scotia who worried about the U.S. market (CBC Archives 1984). Finally in 1987, the Canadian Government restricted the hunting of seal pups (Canadian Geographic 2007; Yeld 2001). According to the new regulations, whitecoats (i.e., harp seal pups) and bluebacks (i.e., hooded seal pups) can no longer be hunted until they begin to moult. Whitecoats are usually anywhere between 10 to 14 days old when they

begin moulting, bluebacks, on the other hand, do not begin to moult until they are 15 to 16 months of age (Fisheries and Aquaculture Management 2002). The Canadian Government also outlawed large-vessel hunting (i.e., vessels over 65 feet in length) and introduced hunting regulations that were intended to result in a humane hunt. All these measures had a negative impact on sealing, even though it never completely stopped (Yeld 2001).

In 1989, John Alan Lee (1989), professor of sociology at the University of Toronto, examined the Canadian seal hunt and voice given by the press to both sides of the seal war. Lee found that the “seal war” (1989, 38) had been, from its very beginning, a moral conflict. He further observed that the anti-sealing movement boasted the better communicators, who were adept in “capturing media attention with a variety of sensational tactics” (1989, 38). These tactics habitually provoked Canadian politicians as well as the Canadian press to emotional outbursts such as the following, the first of which is attributed to John Allen Fraser, the minister in charge of sealing in 1984: “Let's not forget who we are dealing with, we are dealing with blackmailers, with liars, with fanatics, so obviously no rational argument can convince fanatics, people that I would call fascists” (as cited by Lee 1989, 38), or the following statement which is attributed to the editors of *The Globe and Mail*, after it became clear that the hunt for seal pups would be restricted: “It is, by now, a matter of mere academic interest that public opinion was turned against seal hunting by irrational argument, misinformation, inconsistent sentimentality ... When this kind of thing picks up momentum, it is unstoppable” (as cited by Lee 1989, 46).

### **EVENTS LEADING TO THE SECOND/CURRENT SEAL WAR**

On December 18, 1995, Canadian Fisheries Minister Brian Tobin announced an increased TAC of 250,000 for the 1996 seal hunt (International Marine Mammal Association 1995). He stated that according to a recent report from the Fisheries Resource Conservation

Council, the concern about “ever increasing seal populations” ... “as a significant constraint to the recovery of groundfish stocks” is “very relevant.” This marked the official revival of the seal hunt by the Canadian Government (Kauder et al. 2006, online), and significant government subsidies were used to rebuild the industry (Canadian Institute for Business and the Environment 2001).

From December 14-18, 1995, the Eleventh Biennial Conference on the Biology of Marine Mammals was held in Orlando, FL. During that meeting, ninety-seven marine mammalogists from 15 countries responded to Tobin’s announcement by signing a petition entitled *Comment on Canada’s Seal Policy*. The petition declared: “As professionals in the field of marine mammal biology we disagree with the Canadian Government’s statement that North Atlantic seals are a ‘conservation problem.’ All scientific efforts to find an effect of seal predation on Canadian groundfish stocks have failed to show any impact. Overfishing remains the only scientifically demonstrated conservation problem related to fish stock collapse. If fishing closures continue, the evidence indicates that the stocks will recover, and killing seals will not speed that process” (International Marine Mammal Association 1995, online). Further, during the conference, the Society of Marine Mammalogy created the Committee of Scientific Advisors, which named—as one of its main concerns—the necessity “to investigate the misuse of science to justify the culling of Northwest Atlantic harp seals as a fisheries ‘conservation’ measure” (Lavigne and International Marine Mammal Association 1995, online).

In 1996, members of IFAW disguised as photographers of a U.S. hunting magazine managed to videotape the hunt. The images caught on tape convinced the Newfoundland Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to finally join the anti-sealing movement, and further shamed the sealing industry (Brosnahan 1997). As Brosnahan stated on CBC’s *The World At Six*

“It's a charge that just won't go away: inhumane hunters, suffering seals.” The video showed, “among many other bloody scenes . . . . . a sealer skinning a live seal after dragging it over the ice with a hook.” According to the IFAW, the video captured 144 violations of federal sealing regulations (Brosnahan 1997, online).

In the early 2000s, the seal war finally heated up again. Even though it has not yet stimulated much interest in academia, it has led yet again to severe political confrontation. For example, when a U.S. family contacted all Canadian Senators to voice concerns about the “horrible” and “inhumane” seal hunt and to let it be known that all family vacations to Canada will remain cancelled until the seal hunt has been permanently outlawed, Senator Céline Hervieux-Payette responded by describing what she finds horrible about her neighbor to the south: “The daily massacre of innocent people in Iraq, the execution of prisoners—mainly blacks—in American prisons, the massive sale of handguns to Americans, the destabilization of the entire world by the American Government's aggressive foreign policy” (CBC News 2006b, online).

Considering that marketing theory and practice generally focus on satisfying consumer needs and wants, such harsh reactions by a government official to one of Canada's most important target markets are puzzling and counterproductive, especially in light of the fact that sealing contributes very little to the value of the Newfoundland fishery (CBC News 2007c; DFO 2007a) and provides seasonal employment to relatively few individuals (Klapper 2007). Throughout the years, the value of the hunt has been estimated at 0.06% to 0.09% of the gross domestic product (GDP) of Newfoundland (Anonymous 2006; Department of Fisheries and Ocean 2007a; Southey 1997). Even in 2006, when harp seal pelts brought a record price of \$104 CAD each, the contribution of the hunt to the GDP of Newfoundland was reported at 0.12%

(Department of Fisheries and Ocean 2007a; Government of Newfoundland and Labrador 2007), and its contribution to Canada's GDP was 0.0022% (CIA 2007; U.S. Department of Agriculture 2007). In terms of employment, only about 4,000 to 6,000 fishermen participate in the annual seal hunt as an off-season activity (Kangas 2005; Klapper 2007) to supplement their annual income by an average of only \$1,500 Canadian before expenses (The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 2006).

## **METHODS**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In securing and analyzing the data, we used elements of “netnography,” a relatively new qualitative research methodology developed by Kozinets (2002). Netnography can be defined as the online equivalent of ethnography and is based on the premise that consumers are increasingly turning to computer-mediated communications to gain access to information that can aid their decision-making processes. Netnography mainly focuses on online environments that foster the exchange of ideas and the development of online communities that are viewed as more objective than information dispensed by corporations. Netnography as a marketing research technique offers a number of advantages. First, it makes use of publicly available information “to understand the needs and decision influences of relevant consumer groups” (Kozinets 2002, 62). Second, since the information is available online, the process of data collection is less expensive, immensely shortened and simplified, and can also lead to more timely information than other qualitative techniques. Third, netnography can be conducted entirely unobtrusively. Fourth, since the exchange of information, ideas, opinions and beliefs takes place in a natural environment chosen by consumers, netnography gives insights into actual behaviors. And fifth, netnography often allows the continued observation of consumers in their chosen online environment. Of

course, there are some drawbacks to this technique, most notably its narrow focus on virtual communities and the relative scarcity of demographic consumer information, both of which might impede generalization to other populations of interest. And of course, as with all qualitative research, another limitation is the need for interpretive skills when analyzing the data. In this context, Kozinets (2002) points out that the need to contextualize online data during data analysis is likely to present a challenge due to the relative scarcity of social cues provided by online contexts. Even though he suggests that this might impede trustworthiness (i.e., validity), he explains that netnography allows to uniquely render the behavior or act—rather than the individual—the ultimate unit of analysis, and therefore this lack of social cues and demographic information is not likely to impede data analysis. Further, since the posting of computer text can be considered a social action, every aspect surrounding this behavior—including the type and content of the posting as well as the chosen medium—is relevant observational data and therefore positively impacts trustworthiness (Kozinets 2002).

## DESCRIPTION OF THE DATASET

The textual discourse of the present research is the outcome of an online petition that was posted on a virtual community that, at that particular time, was frequented by over seven million consumers who are interested in ethical and social issues, including matters relating to animal welfare and rights. The petition was posted by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) which includes about 10 million members—or one in every 30 persons—and is thus the largest NGOs focusing on animal welfare in the U.S. (HSUS 2007a). It shows the picture of a sealer lifting his hakapik to crush the skull of a juvenile harp seal as the seal looks up at him. It informs that of the 325,000 seals killed during the 2006 seal hunt most were “as young as 12 days of age.” It further states more than 440,000 consumers have joined the boycott to date, and that

snow crab exports to the U.S. have declined by \$350 million CAD since the beginning of the boycott. The petition then asks consumers to pledge participation in the Canadian Seafood Boycott. The petition was posted on March 22, 2007, and its goal of 50,000 valid signatures was reached on May 20, 2007.

Even though signatories have to be registered users of the virtual community to sign any of the petitions, they can specify whether they want a petition to display their names. Signatories were asked to declare their country and state (if applicable) of origin, and further to add a message to the Canadian Government explaining why they are using their buying power to end the seal hunt. By the time the goal of 50,000 valid signatures was reached, individuals from 112 countries had signed the petition (see table 1 for further detail). To help streamline the data analysis, we decided to focus on the messages generated by consumers in the U.S. Of the 50,000 consumers who signed the petition 46,228 originated from the U.S. (see table 2 for further detail). In addition, 5,325 of the 46,228 U.S. signatories opted to remain anonymous. A total of 17,525 U.S. consumers left a message for the Canadian Government. Two thousand eighteen of these messages were left by consumers who chose to remain anonymous; 15,478 by consumers who identified themselves; and 29 of these messages were either unrelated (15) or pro-sealing (14).

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## ETHICAL ISSUES

It has been argued that consumers who post messages in a public online area have, in effect, given implicit informed consent. Consequently, having researchers provide anonymity to consumers who post these messages cancels the need to formally request informed consent (see Sudweeks and Rafaeli 1995). Considering that consumers increasingly have been using online environments to discuss and contemplate consumption-related topics, marketers are gradually shifting their attention to these online market segments. Therefore, it is important that researchers utilizing online data follow rigorous and ethical procedures when harvesting and analyzing the data as well as reporting the research results (Kozinets 2002). For that reason, we have disguised the identities of the consumers whose comments we summarize or cite. That is, signatory entries were renumbered after those who do not live in the U.S. and/or did not leave a message intended for the Canadian Government were deleted from the dataset. That is, instead of signatory entries being assigned numerical values from 1 to 50,000, the condensed dataset reflects signatory entries from 1 to 17,527. These numerical values, plus the gender of the boycotter (if it could be derived from the signatories' names), in addition with the classification "anonymous" versus "identified," were used when summarizing or citing individual boycotters' comments.

## DATA ANALYSIS

As suggested by Kozinets and Handelman (2004), we iteratively analyzed these 17,496 messages for expected and evolving themes, and then compared our findings to the existing literature on consumer boycotts and related topics as well as media coverage of the seal hunt. It should, however, be noted that due to the sheer number of different themes addressed in the dataset, only those relevant to understanding consumer boycott behavior and those giving us an idea about who these boycotters are will be included in this analysis.

Even though the HSUS did not ask consumers to provide demographic data, some of the comments show that the signatories come from varied age groups, educational and professional backgrounds. The age of the signatories ranges from an 11-year old child to a 74-year old former gunnery sergeant. There are a number of signatories who are clergy, Ph.D.s, MDs, and DVMS. There are others who report that they own or manage companies and no longer buy Canadian supplies, as well as those who are in the travel business and apparently steer clients away from vacations in Canada. There are also a number of teachers and college professors who have committed to educating their students about the seal hunt.

*Theme 1—Is Participating in the Boycott a Sacrifice?:* Quite a number of boycotters express how strongly they feel about the seal hunt. It seems that giving up the consumption of Canadian seafood is very easy. This does not come as a surprise since Canadian seafood has numerous substitutes, and the cost of participating in the boycott is thus very small to consumers (John and Klein 2003) who can choose to buy seafood from other countries' fisheries, or substitute other meat or food products for seafood (Department of Finance 2006; Sen, Guerhan-Canli and Morwitz 2001). It further seems that these boycotters believe that they are morally obligated to participate in the boycott at any cost until the seal hunt is abolished. Kozinets and Handelman (1998; 477) found similar reactions among boycotting consumers and stated that "the action of boycotting, subjectively experienced, seems akin to a hygienically cleansing process."

For example, boycotter #225 (female, identified) states: *I am so against this hunt that if it means going totally vegan in order to make sure that I do not buy any Canadian [seafood], I'll do it in a heartbeat.* Likewise, boycotter #1316 (female, identified) writes: *I will not finance murder. Therefore I will not be supporting the Canadian seafood industry.* Boycotter #7384 (female, identified) harbors such strong feelings about the hunt that she states: *I'd rather D-I-E*

*than purchase any Canadian seafood products, any Canadian made products and in addition, partake in Canadian tourism until the "satanic" slaughter of Canadian BABY seals stops! You got that Canadian Government? Are you hearing me and thousands, if not millions of others around the WORLD who are outraged by your annual savage slaughter of baby seals. I AM SPENDING MY MONEY ELSEWHERE, ... and I am doing it with pride! And boycotter #9269 (gender unknown, identified) exclaims: Every time I think of what you are condoning and allowing, it makes me sick deep to the core; ethically, morally, and instinctually sickened. Nothing you could offer me would be tempting enough to diminish or ease the repulsiveness of your seal hunt.*

*Theme 2—The Power of Boycotts:* Klein et al. (2004) find that for consumers to participate in a boycott, they need to believe that with this boycott they can, indeed, make a difference. This seems to be the case with a rather large number of signatories. Signatories also address additional issues that are related to the potential effect of the boycott on the boycott target.

Apparently, boycotter #156 (female, identified) has just noticed the potential impact of a boycott and states: *I have always been against seal hunting but did not know until now I can use my buying power to help end it. Believe me I will!* Boycotter #967 (female, identified) is very certain about the power of boycotts and notes: *Boycotting a product is one of the most effective ways to let a producer know the intensity of a person's feelings on a subject. I wish this boycott could have the power to stop these seal hunts now and forever.* Boycotter #4888 (male, identified) seems to be very confident that the boycott will inflict financial damage: *Is Canada so desperate they must allow the killing of helpless and innocent babies? ... The few dollars this*

*terrible industry makes is totally wiped out be the hundreds of millions you are “losing” from people like [me]; and there e are a lot of us.*

This last comment seems to refer to the vulnerability of Canada’s fishing industry to a boycott (Yuen 2005). Much of the industry’s output is designated for export, making it the fifth largest exporter of seafood and fish products in the world. In 2003, 73%, or \$3.3 billion CAD, of this export volume was designated for the U.S. market. Clearly, a U.S. consumer boycott of Canadian fish products has the potential to be very costly to the Canadian Government and the Canadian fishing industry. Accordingly, the *Toronto Star* had warned early on that such a boycott “even if only partly successful, could be an economic disaster for Canada” (Hepburn 2005, online).

And boycotter #7910 (male, identified) raises another interesting issue by noting: *We will never buy any seafood or other products from Canada because of the seal killings. It takes a lot of time [and] money to persuade people to buy their products once they [quit] or try another.* Once the boycott is over, Canada’s fishing industry is likely to face a problem. The recovery to previous sales levels at the pre-boycott price structure to pre-boycott customers might be slowed down because it generally takes consumers time to forget and forgive the offensive behavior (Ettenson and Klein 2005), if they return at all. That is, two-thirds of those who participate in a boycott are unlikely to return to the target’s products even after the boycott has been called off (Clouder and Harrison 2005). Consequently, the longer a boycott lasts, the more consumers will have been recruited to participate and the longer the subsequent recovery will take (Best 2004).

Boycotter #1156 (male, identified) raises another interesting issue: *I talked with [the Department of] Fisheries and Oceans and they feel as if the boycott has not affected them at all. Do not go to Canada and do not buy anything made in Canada.* That is, even though both the

Canadian Government and the NGOs having organized the boycott agree that the value of specifically crab exports alone to the U.S. has declined significantly since 2004; they attribute it to different reasons. The Canadian Government admits that “although the quantity [of snow crabs] exported to the USA has remained quite constant in recent years, the value declined significantly in 2005 and 2006 compared to 2003-2004....” (DFO 2007b, online). According to the HSUS, the value of snow crab exports to the U.S. decreased by \$350 million CAD, or about 36%, between March 29, 2005, the day the boycott was launched, and March 22, 2007, the day the boycott petition was posted online. Even though the HSUS admits that there are several possible causes for this steep decline, it maintains that the seafood boycott has had a major impact (Harper 2007; HSUS 2006). On the other hand, several politicians and departments within the Canadian Government, in addition to the Center for Consumer Freedom, a lobbying group for the food industry, have vehemently denied that the boycott has had any impact (CTV.ca 2007b). The Canadian Government blames the decrease in value on “high inventories, falling demand, and the appreciation of the Canadian dollar” (Department of Finance 2006, online).

So, who is right? The Canadian Government or the NGOs? First, it has been found that boycott targets generally deny publicly that there has been any effect on their sales and profits (Davidson 1995). Second, it seems that Canadian fish processing plants are starting to feel the heat. Some have received communications from U.S. customers demanding guarantees that they are not involved in the seal hunt (CTV.ca 2007b). Third, there might be an easy explanation for the conflicting reports. That is, seafood has a high degree of substitutability which makes the demand for this product class fairly elastic (Best 2004). Accordingly, a decrease in the demand of Canadian seafood will lead to a decrease in its price. Even though consumers who have

pledged to participate in the boycott are not likely to buy even at a lower price, the target will notice that as the price drops, seafood sales are likely to pick up again. Non-traditional buyers, to whom the seafood was not attractive at a higher price, now see it as a viable purchase at the lower price. Price-sensitive non-traditional buyers are those who generally do not care about the country-of-origin and include institutions such as hospitals, schools, prisons, governmental agencies, and industrial caterers. Since the amount of the product sold is thus likely to remain fairly stable—albeit at a lower price—while production costs are expected to remain constant, profitability will be reduced (Best 2004). And fourth, it is difficult to believe that hundreds of thousands of boycotters do not have any impact at all.

*Theme 3—Vow to Boycott all Canadian Products and/or Travel to Canada:* It should be noted that 2,615 of the boycotters felt the need to let David Emerson, Canadian Minister of International Trade, know that they will be boycotting all Canadian products. Boycotter #10 (female, identified), for example, states: *I will not be a part of any act that causes suffering and is cruel and inhumane. Therefore, I will not buy any products from your country until you put a stop to this barbaric slaughter.* Likewise, boycotter #21 (anonymous) writes: *So CRUEL... we MUST STOP THIS TODAY. No More Canadian ANYTHING!* And 1,342 boycotters pledged to boycott all travel to Canada. For example, boycotter #13300 (female, identified) expresses: *I think the Canadian Tourist Industry should wake up. I am not even interested in visiting a country with such practices.*

*Theme 4—Encouraging Others to Join the Boycott/Educate Others:* Best (2005) also suggests that a prolonged seafood boycott would actually make the collaborating NGOs stronger by increasing both the number of members and donations, and thereby making it possible for the

NGOs to sustain such a boycott indefinitely. That is, the longer a boycott lasts, the more time NGOs will have to locate and recruit consumers who are against the seal hunt.

A total of 923 boycotters promised that they will spread the word about the boycott, even though—based on the outrage expressed by many more—it stands to reason this number might be understating the actual reach of the boycott petition. For example, boycotter #13 (female, identified) states: *This practice is absolutely barbaric. I will boycott everything coming from Canada and encourage others to do the same!* And boycotter #2118 (female, identified) is representative of the many teachers and professors who have pledged to educate their students about this issue: *I'm a retired elementary school teacher who taught a whole lesson for 20 years about murdering harp seals in such a brutal manner. The children were so horrified that I have no doubt they still would sign these petitions.* Further, boycotter #10155 (female, identified) promises: *... I will make it my goal on a daily basis to tell at least one person about your action. I will also inform them of the decision I have made to boycott Canadian seafood and the restaurants which serve them.*

*Theme 5—Seals Are Innocent, Empathy for Seals:* Numerous boycotters seem to feel empathy for the seals, and it appears that some even identify with the seals. A look at the comments shows that Ivar Martinsen, a shrimp fisherman from Norway, encapsulated the problem the sealing nations are dealing with when he stated that he thinks that “a lot of people look upon the seals as kind of human being. They pop out of the water with these big eyes and they have this sort of humanity about them” (Fleishman 2004, online). This attitude is probably going to make it very difficult for the Canadian Government to re-educate its consumers into believing that the seal hunt is humane and sustainable (Brautigam 2007).

Boycotter #81 (female, identified), for example, states: *I cannot believe that a human being or leader could be so barbaric and insensitive as to murder in the most cruel way, a baby seal. You must have no soul or heart. How would you like your child treated this way and for money and greed. Believe it or not animals have similar instincts and feelings. They just cannot express themselves. You should be very ashamed of yourselves. I have no respect for an inhuman barbarian that allows or does this.* Likewise, boycotter #381 (female, identified) exclaims: *Please stop the violence on these beautiful, harmless, animals! How can you honestly look them in the face—into [their] eyes and not see a reflection of yourself, your innocence! You are killing them in cold blood and that is murder!!!* Similarly, boycotter #8919 (female, identified) notes: *Wow ... never thought Canadians are murderers. Taking an innocent life of a baby is just immoral and wrong!! How you do sleep at night and wake up in the morning to look at yourself knowing you take a life away from a breathing creature who deserves to live [its] life to the fullest!?!?!?!?* Finally, these feelings are not restricted to female boycotters as is evidenced by boycotter #13874 (male, identified) who states: *I think that every person that takes place in the seal hunt should be convicted of murder because these baby seals are no less than a baby human.* To some these reactions might be very strong and even irrational. According to Calgary-based psychiatrist Robin Reesal, however, these reactions are normal since “people become more emotional about animal cruelty cases than those involving people because they see animals as helpless creatures” (CBC News 2006c).

*Theme 6—Impact of the Green Movement: Fear the Destruction of the Ecosystem/Global Warming:* Another reoccurring topic focuses on environmental issues relating to the seal hunt. It appears that quite a number of the boycotters are familiar with the problems the seal pups experienced during the 2007 seal hunt. That is, over 90% of the harp seal babies born and nursed

in the Southern Gulf St. Lawrence (over 100,000) drowned due to melting ice (Glendenning 2007; Spiegel Online 2007d). Since seal babies cannot swim yet, they need stable ice. During the past five years, however, unseasonably warm weather has led to deteriorating ice conditions (Struck 2007).

For example, boycotter #3617 (male, identified) states: *This is an abomination. With global warming, disappearing Arctic sea ice, these marine mammals do not need humans to further diminish their chances for survival. Stop the hunt now.* Boycotter #10767 (male, identified) actually reshapes Canada's responsibility toward the seals: *Baby seals are already dying by the thousands due to global warming. The ice is melting and they drown before they properly learn to swim. We need no help from the Canadians in killing them - they should be trying to SAVE THEM!* And boycotter #4320 (female, identified) refers to both global warming and overfishing: *... Global warming is already threatening this species with babies drowning because of the melting ice. Man has interfered too long with nature and now needs to respect and live and let live.* Boycotter #7971 (female, identified) focuses on the overall effect of the seal hunt on the ecosystem: *Seals are the sustainable, balanced predator of the organisms we are harvesting at a horrific rate. I believe in freedom, and I believe in the specific right to honest labor at a living wage, but I do not believe anyone has the right to work in an industry that blatantly harms an ecosystem.*

*Theme 7—A Picture Speaks More Than a Thousand Words:* Friedman (1999) strongly recommends the use of graphic pictures to communicate about the egregious behavior. This probably has been one of the most successful tools used by the NGOs fighting the annual seal hunt. The videos that have been placed on *YouTube* and *My Space*, as well as on the websites of the NGOs ([http://hsus.org/protect\\_seals.html](http://hsus.org/protect_seals.html)) very dramatically show how seals are being

slaughtered—usually by crushing their heads with a club or a hakapik. They also how the hook at the tip of the hakapik is then driven through an eye socket so it can be used to drag the seals across the ice to the sealing vessel leaving behind nothing but a bloody trail, and subsequently how the seals are being skinned, some while still thrashing around and crying out. It is commonly said that a picture is worth a thousand words (Friedman 1999); a video showing the seal hunt, however, must be worth hundreds of thousand of dollars to the NGO showing it. The following comments show how much impact the videos have had.

Boycotter #10041 (female, identified) maintains: *When I saw this series on HBO it literally made me sick to my stomach. This is the most disgusting form of inhumane treatment I have ever seen and heard of!!! How anyone can look into the innocent eyes of these beautiful creatures and make the decision to bash their brains in is beyond me....especially those who are barely old enough to get around!!! These animals (humans) who perform this act should be executed the same way just to know how it feels. Please stop the murdering of one of God's most beautiful creations.* And boycotter #11950 (female, identified) asks: *How can anyone, after viewing the videos and images, continue to defend such a heinous act? What I want to know is how you sleep at night knowing you've committed mass murder.*

Further, the videos seem to have a long-term effect, as evidenced by boycotter #13349 (male, identified) who states: *I'm 60 years old, but my mind still contains images of a film I saw in high school of baby seals being clubbed by hunters. In some cases these animals are not even dead when they are skinned by the hunters. Please stop this savagery.* Likewise, boycotter #16036 (female, identified) explains: *I was about 10 years old when I first saw the horrific act of a man taking a bat to the head of a baby seal. I was sickened by the inhuman act. I sat down and wrote President Gerald Ford and begged him to have this stopped. Here I am now 40 years old*

*and cannot believe that this still exists. We are not cavemen or uneducated people. Why is this still an issue???? Why are we torturing these beautiful animals? Stop this now!!* And finally, boycotter #16534 (female, identified) remembers: *30 years ago, my son's school teacher asked us to watch a film about the MURDER of baby seals. My four children and I cried during the film. It was in our opinion, out and out MURDER of babies.*

*Theme 8—Clubbing Baby Seals to Death While Their Mothers Are Watching:* This section shows how just how powerful the video footage of the seal hunt can be. An extensive search of NGO websites has shown that none of these organizations claim anymore that baby seals are killed before their mothers' eyes. This practice apparently used to be fairly common until 1987 at which time the Canadian Government outlawed the killing of whitecoats (Kraus 2004). However, since harp seals permanently abandon their pups when they are approximately 12 days old and begin to moult (i.e., shed) (Marinebio.org 2007), today's hunters mostly focus on beaters (Kraus 2004)—seals which have completed the moult (Marinebio.org 2007)—because their fur demands the highest price (Carino Company Limited 2007). The comments left by boycotters, however, show that they are still haunted by these pictures. For example, boycotter #416 (gender unknown, identified) explains: *When I was 7, I saw this cruelty on TV, when I was 26, I visited the baby seals through IFAW (Gulf of St. Lawrence). I have a picture of a baby seal who rolled over to let me pet its belly like a kitten or puppy. I will never forget the innocence or trust. I cannot believe I am 50 now and I am still writing letters of protest. The mother seals come over or view from a distance, she stays by her baby or bloodied smell for [days]; it is pitiful. The humans who allow this should be clubbed.* Similarly, boycotter #10134 (female, identified) exclaims: *I saw a television program in 1978 about these baby seals being killed, clubbed to death, while the mother seal watched screaming in agony. You cannot tell me*

*this was something that did not hurt all involved including me! And boycotter #1810 (female, identified) apparently has read a story describing this scenario: This is one of the most barbaric acts imaginable. "A Sea of Mother's Tears" is a short story about a mother seal witnessing her baby being slaughtered. It will tear your heart out. How can a supposedly civilized human being commit such a horrendous act? It MUST be stopped. Adverse effects on the Canadian economy and the "Killers'" wallets may be something these idiots can understand. Made in Canada—Made in Hell. I wouldn't purchase any Canadian products if I was starving to death and will share this information with as many people as possible. This horrible senseless act must be stopped.*

*Theme 9—Skinned While Alive and Conscious:* In 2001, a team of five veterinarians from the U.S, UK, and Canada was commissioned by the IFAW to go out on the ice to comprehensively examine the skulls of 76 carcasses left behind by sealers (Burdon et al. 2001). Carcasses were randomly chosen from a number of areas representative of the hunt on March 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>. In all cases, the team arrived after the sealers had left, and the sealers did not know that the abandoned carcasses were to be evaluated. The veterinarians could not detect lesions of the skull in 17% of the carcasses, which indicates that the seals were conscious when being skinned. An additional 25% showed either minimal to moderate skull fractures, which indicates a "decreased level of consciousness," but most likely not unconsciousness (Burdon et al. 2001, 8). Adding these two figures leads to the claim that is highly probable that 42% of seals were alive and conscious when skinned (IFAW 2007b; Lavigne 2005; Schlyter et al. 2006; Senate Resolution 118 2007). The vets further found that 28% of the skulls showed mandibular fractures, meaning a blow had struck the bottom of the head instead of the top. This is in violation of the Canadian Sealing Regulations (Burdon et al. 2001; Daoust et al. 2002). The

veterinarians were also asked to observe videotapes of the 1998, 1999, and 2000 seal hunts. Accordingly, the tapes show that in 79% of the 179 observed cases, sealers do not check for corneal reflex to ascertain that a seal is unconscious before hooking or skinning it (Burdon et al. 2001). Apparently, IFAW must have done a good job promoting the study, which is well-known as the “independent vet study,” even though it is available only on the IFAW website. A Google search for the term “harp seals skinned alive” brings 227,000 hits on October 3, 2007.

Apparently, quite a number of signatories are familiar with that study. For example, boycotter #2464 (female, identified) is outraged: *Canada, I pledge and promise to never ever buy any products from your country and pledge and promise that I will never ever visit your country!! I don't care to deal with a country that cares more about money than a life. Canada the country that exchanges money for the pools of blood from many many helpless baby seals who are brutally beaten to death and many are even skinned alive .... SHAME ON CANADA!!!!* And some of the signatories even cite the statistics of the “independent veterinary study.” Boycotter #13768 (female, identified), for example, requests: *Please take immediate action to end the seal hunt once and for all. It is outrageous that over 40% of the baby seals are skinned alive. It is completely unacceptable that these innocent animals are being killed for their fur. PLEASE put an end to this horrific slaughter NOW!!!*

Some of the boycotters appear to be veterinary professionals and as such have a less emotional approach. For example, boycotter #5258 (female, identified) maintains: *As a veterinary student, I found it disturbing that a study found that nearly half of the seals were skinned alive. That method of destruction wouldn't even pass at a slaughterhouse.* And boycotter #9402 (male, identified, DVM) suggests: *There are at least two questions here: Is this necessary? If so, is the method humane? Since many of the babies are killed, it is not properly*

*selective. Since some are skinned alive according to postmortems, this is inhumane as a method.....*

*Theme 10—Canada Compared to China and Japan: It appears that many of the boycotters are interested in issues related to animal cruelty in general. What might be of concern to the Canadian Government is that the seal hunt is likened to Japan's whale hunt and dolphin slaughter as well as China's fur farms and shark hunts. That is, #353 (female, identified) states: This is barbaric and inhumane. I view Canada as I view China with their Dog & Cat Farms, killing and skinning animals alive for a small profit. I look at you with disgust! In my eyes, you are not even human... Likewise, boycotter #652 (anonymous) notes: I will boycott Canadian seafood because I do not believe that killing seals is justified; no matter what the estimated population is. It is cruel and barbaric to bludgeon an animal to death, I thought Canada was a developed country, but their practices on seals are equal to China's skinning raccoon dogs alive. Shame on you, who is the "ugly American" now? And boycotter #827 (female, identified) exclaims: What a gruesome lot of people!!!!!! Don't forget about China cutting off fins and throwing the sharks back to sea to drown, just for some fin soup!!! Then we have Japan on the other hand, luring dolphins near shore and then massively killing them and leaving them to suffer. THE SIGHT IS HORRIFIC!! I could not believe my eyes!!! These are not people, they are sub-animal!!!!!! I hope they all rot in hell!! And boycotter #3132 (female, identified) pledges: I vow to never purchase any CANADIAN ITEM until the slaughter of seal pups is brought to a grinding halt. This slaughter is outdated and antiquated as is your thinking. Please cease the killing of these innocent animals. You should be ashamed. What you do is no different that what the Chinese do to the dogs and cats in China and no different from what the Japanese do to dolphins in Taiji. Shame on you!!!!!! You will find no Canadian goods in this household! And*

boycotter #11151 (female, identified) states: *I will stop eating seafood altogether.....we have China killing our domestic pets now this....ban the two Cs!*

And as a final example, boycotter #6247 (male, identified) extends the comparison even further: *Unbelievable - everyone who cares about animals should take proper actions against Canada by boycotting their products. We should also educate the public against buying fur from Norway, Russia and China, which may have come from baby seals that were killed barbarically.*

*Theme 11—We Save Seals and You Kill Them:* The U.S. passed the U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, which does not allow the trade in products derived from marine mammals (The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 2006). The adoption of this act has had an impact on how marine mammals are viewed in the U.S. As a case in point, a survey of 500 likely republican voters in Ohio showed that over three-quarters of these voters feel that it is the responsibility of the U.S. Congress to protect the oceans and marine mammals (Oceana 2006). Accordingly, it is not surprising to have boycotter #12645 (female, identified) state: *I volunteer for the marine mammal center... we SAVE seals.* And boycotter #9071 (female, identified) explains: *I volunteer for the Marine Mammal Stranding Center here in NJ. We rescue seals, most of whom are babies that have stranded on our beaches. We treat these beautiful animals and release them back to the sea. I hate to think that at the same time we are putting in all this effort and money into this process, that our neighbors to the north are allowing the cruel killing of these seals. This must stop now.*

*Theme 12—Are All Signatories Vegetarian or Vegan?:* This is an interesting and much discussed issue in the psychology literature as well as by pro-sealing forces, and sheds some light as to who participates in this boycott. It has been argued that those who reject the killing of animals for fur, should—in order to be congruent—also reject the killing of animals for food

(Galvin and Herzog 1992; Herzog 1993). This logic is picked up by few of the boycotters, but defied by many more. For example, boycotter #136 (male, identified) states: *Of course, I assume everyone who has signed this petition is a vegetarian, otherwise they are hypocrites, but yes, the seal hunt is disgusting. An interesting history of human exploitation of furry mammals is in Clive Ponting's A Green History of the World.* He finds support from boycotter #4541 (female, identified) who asserts: *Meat is murder!*

However, the following views are much more common. That is, boycotter #610 (male, identified) explains: *I am a hunter, farmer, and fisherman and the manner that you kill these trusting animals is not only unethical but downright wrong in every sense of the word. There are humane ways to hunt and there are other options for commercializing fish such as 'fish-farming' that [are] more cost effective in terms of wallet and environment. You are frowned-down by the large number of hunters and the NRA would have a word or two for you. You are a disgrace to the food industry, fellow consumers, and the earth in general. Come out of your 'primitive' ways of making a buck and get with the 21st century.* Female hunters seem to agree with this sentiment as shown by boycotter #1178 (female, identified), who states: *OMG. I watched a video about this stuff and I just about cried. I am a hunter (I'm sorry) but the way they kill these animals [is just cruel] ....* And boycotter #6313 (male, anonymous) maintains: *My boycott begins today. I am not an animal rights activist and I deer hunt strictly for the food. That being said, I do not believe seals should be beaten to death in the name of greed, for a meager profit. GET REAL JOBS! Hmmm, what are 12 million of us in Illinois supposed to do if we need to supplement our income? It sure as hell isn't slaughtering seals. Just leave them be for God's sake! We're trashing the planet enough as it is.* Boycotter #11765 (female, identified) clarifies that there is a difference between wildlife and farm animals: *I am outraged at this practice! These are not*

*animals that are bred and killed humanely for food. Defenseless babies are tracked down and brutally murdered for their skins?? That is just evil.*

*Theme 13—Hands off Our Wildlife:* Interestingly, quite a number of boycotters also express that Canada has no right to kill “our wildlife.” Boycotter #360 (female, identified), for example, states: *I will encourage everyone I know to avoid any product Canadian until the Seal Hunt's end! Our wildlife is a legacy we owe our loved ones in future generations.* Likewise, boycotter #5262 (female, identified) suggests: *Please stop this senseless killing. You will be affecting our ecosystem and the balance of our sea-life. There are other more important things in your country to focus on. Make that change just like the other countries are doing...* Boycotter #14599 (female, identified) feels that: *These seals belong to me, too, and I choose to not kill them. You are violating my rights. I will not buy anything Canadian.* Similarly, boycotter #16601 (female, identified) explains: *I am appalled that the Canadian government continues to [condone] the slaughter of baby seals! Natural wildlife is a national and international resource. Please take a stand to prevent this useless slaughter of the baby seals who have absolutely no defense against the criminals who kill them! ... Their lives are in your hands. Do the right thing and take legislative action to protect them!*

*Theme 14—Secondary Boycotts:* As mentioned previously, secondary boycotts are aimed at retailers that sell products produced by the primary boycott target. The purpose of secondary boycotts is to try to force these retailers to discontinue selling the products in question. A look at the petition reveals that numerous signatories pledge not only to boycott Canadian Seafood, but also those restaurant chains serving Canadian fish and/or retailers selling products derived from seals. Specifically, signatories mention Red Lobster and Costco. As a case in point, boycotter #1229 (gender unknown, identified) states: *I have been boycotting Canadian seafood for over a*

*year now and will continue until this ghastly practice is abolished. I no longer patronize any Darden restaurants, such as Olive Garden, Red Lobster, Seasons 52 and Smokey Bones, since they are well-known for using Canadian seafood. Boycotter #3650 (anonymous) feels strongly about this issue: I am so outraged. ... If your fishermen need work so bad, then they can go back to school like the rest of us with crap jobs and retrain. ... No snow crabs, Canadian seafood or Red Lobster restaurants for me or my family. Good day to you sir. And boycotter #10639 (gender unknown, identified) exclaims: The seal hunts are what got me into animal rights activism as a kid ... now that they're reared their head again I'm just appalled. I actively boycott Red Lobster and have pretty much stopped eating crab all together since no one seems to want to tell me where they get it from anymore... And boycotter #17369 (female, identified) adds: If this is the cost of eating shrimp at Red Lobster, then it's too high. No more dinners there for us!!!*

Boycotters seem to be equally angry at Costco for a number of reasons. Boycotter #5366 (male, identified), for example, explains: *1st off I'm going to call Costco and let them know that I am disappointed with their decision to restock seal oil capsules in their Atlantic Canada stores and failure to refrain from selling Canadian snow crab in their U.S. and Canadian stores. I will Use my purchasing power to only shop at stores that are concerned about seals. Boycotter #13848 (female, identified) is so angry at Costco that she has started her own petition against Costco practices: For shame, Canada! If those horrible people tortured animals to death like those poor seals here [in the U.S.], they'd be spending time in jail. Not only do I vow to boycott Canada & its products, I have started a petition to boycott Costco [the authors removed the name of the website that features the petition to afford anonymity to this boycotter] because it sells seal products. I won't tolerate cruelty to animals! I am working on a proposal to get harp seals listed as a CITES species. Since Canada won't protect them from extreme brutality, maybe*

*it's time for some international oversight!* And boycotter #13954 (male, identified) shows his displeasure with Costco by expressing: *I have already canceled my Costco membership because they sell seal oil capsules in their Newfoundland stores. Costco says its decision to sell this product was just based on consumer demand, so by not buying anything at Costco (and not buying products that directly or indirectly support the seal hunt), I am doing my part to reduce consumer demand.*

*Theme 15—The Seal Hunt as a Traditional Right:* It has often been stated by Canadian politicians and sealers that the seal hunt is important to the traditional way of life in Newfoundland and therefore needs to continue (Malling 1978; Peterson 2007). It seems that many of the boycotters do not agree that traditions should be allowed to go on if they do harm to others and other species. For them, the well-being of the seals is more important than “out-dated” traditions. Boycotter #4320 (female, identified) suggests: *The seal hunt is a barbaric practice that continues on more out of a disillusioned sense of tradition than practicality. The Canadian fishing industry has over-fished the cod to the brink of extinction and now [is] hunting the seals with same reckless abandon. ...* Likewise, boycotter #5922 (gender unknown, identified) states: *Since I have learned about this awful yearly ritual of killing innocent seals, I have boycotted anything Canadian. Your government needs to realize that these precious lives are far more important than money ever could be, and this is one tradition that is disgusting, and should not be carried on any longer!!!* Further, boycotter #6007 (female, identified) has had issues with this tradition for decades: *I remember writing a letter to Pierre Trudeau in 1970 about this very subject, which is as distasteful now as it was then. Please outlaw this shameful human tradition!* And boycotter #11483 (male, identified) exclaims: *I am pulling all funds from Fidelity's Canada fund unless you stop this senseless outdated nonsense. Tradition ...! We had a lot of traditions in*

*this country, such as forced labor, otherwise known as slavery, which we've moved beyond. GET WITH IT, CANADA!!!!* Boycotter #13282 (male, identified) has equally harsh words about this tradition: *Disgusting and disgraceful. This is not a cultural heritage, but a historical shame. Don't think you can use tradition as an excuse for atrocities. Causing unnecessary suffering should not be the hallmark for any people. It's time to grow up.*

*Theme 16—Invoking God and the Bible:* The success of the animal rights movement in “drawing public attention to the ethical issues involved in our relationships with other species,” led Herzog (1993, 103) to investigate the psychology of animal rights activists. During the course of interviews with 23 activists, Herzog finds that, in general, animal rights activists confront moral dilemmas that most individuals prefer to ignore. He further reports that only two of the activists believe “that traditional religion had significantly influenced their views about the treatment of animals” (1993, 117). Moreover, Jamison, Wenk and Parker (2000) interview animal rights activists in the U.S. and Switzerland and come to the conclusion that the animal rights movement fulfills the criteria of a functional religion.

Based on these findings, we decided to examine the religious affiliations of the boycotters, where possible. Surprisingly, a large number of boycotters invoke God and/or the Bible in their comments. For example, boycotter #210 (anonymous) states: *... may those who seek to make money through this carnage stand before God and shake with fear when they meet HIM!* And boycotter #1498 (female, identified) states: *We must try to live at peace with all of God's creatures. True, some folks feel they need meat for food, but surely the use of fur can only serve to feed vanity.* Boycotter #2827 (anonymous) summarizes: *God gave us this world to take care of it and all living things in it, not to destroy it. It is a cruel thing that you are doing and unnecessary. You will have to answer to God come your judgment day. Remember. He sees*

*everything and knows all.* And boycotter #245 (female, identified) cites: “*If you have men who will exclude any of God's creatures from the shelter of compassion and pity, you will have men who will do likewise with their fellow men.*”—*St Francis of Assisi.*

A number of boycotters cite passages of the Bible. Boycotters #1852 (female, identified) and #11144 (female, identified), for example, cite: *The just man is kind to animals, but the heart of the wicked is merciless. Proverbs 12:10.* And boycotter #13724 (male, identified) quotes: *Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. Protect the rights of all who are helpless. Proverbs 31:8.*

Considering that our findings are not congruent with Herzog’s (1993) and Jamison, Wenk and Parker’s results (2000), it stands to reason that the individuals who boycott Canadian Seafood to force an end of the seal hunt are either not animal rights activists or that concern for animal welfare/rights has become more mainstream and can nowadays be merged with traditional religious beliefs. According to Singer (2006), who finds millions of consumers in Europe and the U.S. are allowing their concern for animal welfare/rights to transform their diets and lifestyles, the latter would be a more viable explanation. This reasoning is supported by a number of additional recent events. In December 2006, for example, *rollingstone.com* published a scathing report on the pollution and cruelty of the pork industry (Tietz 2006). And in June 2007, *Gourmet Magazine* featured a report titled “A View to Kill on Factory Farming” that begins with the following words “The executives who run America's chicken industry might not want you to read this article. Spokesmen at the five biggest companies refused to show me the farms where their suppliers raise the chickens you eat, so that I could see firsthand how they treat them. They refused to show me the slaughterhouses, so I could see how the companies dispatch them. Executives even refused to talk to me about how they raise and kill chickens” (Zwerdling

2007, online). The view that concern for the welfare and/or rights of animals is moving more into the mainstream is also supported by a recent Label Networks survey that shows that of 5,000 youths aged 13 to 24, most named PETA as the nonprofit organization they would like to volunteer for (Severson 2007).

Finally, another recent event has the potential effect further changes in how animal welfare issues are viewed in U.S. society. That is, on November 7, 2007, a group of “leaders of all major denominations” met on Capitol Hill to introduce and sign a proclamation that “outlines a universal commitment to extend kindness and respect not only to the human family, but to animals and to all of creation” (Best Friends Magazine 2008, 32). This event could have far reaching consequences. That is, Keller and Berry (2003), in their quest to identify the most influential individuals in American society (i.e., those individuals who impact what their neighbors buy, how their neighbors vote in political elections, etc.), have found that influentials are those who are most involved in their local communities, and that one way of being engaged in ones community is to be on the church council. Members of the church council, on the other hand, usually work closely with their faith leaders and are likely to accept and/or adopt their world views.

*Theme 17—Opinions of Fishermen/Seal Hunters:* Jean-Claude Lapierre, president of the Seal Hunters' Association on the Magdalen Islands, has complained that individuals opposing the seal hunt “... [have] said publicly that we are barbarians and we massacre seals,” ... “our reputation has been sullied across the planet” (Epoch Times 2007, online). His statement is supported by many of the boycotters’ comments. Apparently many view sealers as less than human, as criminals who need to be punished and jailed. For example, boycotter #241 (female, identified) explains: *One of the characteristics of a serial killer is the lack of empathy and/or*

*compassion for another living being. Studies show serial killers need the extreme to feel anything. These seal killers must have to shut down in order to complete the horrific violence. How healthy can that be?* Also, boycotter #1263 (gender unknown, identified): *This is despicable practice and should be stopped immediately. No living, breathing creature should ever have to endure the horrors perpetrated by these murderers. The people who do the clubbing are no better than cold-blooded serial killers.* And boycotter #2419 (female, identified) expresses: *How can you sleep at night knowing that you are allowing baby seals to be beaten to death for profit? May God forgive you because I can't.* Likewise, boycotter #7618 (female, identified) seems convinced that *....any person who could do that could murder a man, woman, baby without blinking an eye. No Soul, no feelings, no heart!!!*

A number of boycotters also state that sealers kill the seals for fun. This seems to refer to a statement made by sealer Desmond Adams who reportedly stated that “...we all go out for the love of it rather than the money, which isn't there anymore” Taylor (2007b, online). Boycotter #900 (gender unknown, identified): *This is horrendous. Recently the sealers went on record that they kill the babies for fun!!! And when the killing ships were stuck in the ice the Canadian Government went in to subsidize these criminals by aiding [them] with food and ice breakers so the ships would be free to allow these murders to keep on killing. BOYCOTT ANYTHING FROM CANADA!!!!!!!* The second part of this statement refers to the 120 sealing ships that were locked in for over a week by pack ice that had been blown in by severe northeasterly winds (Taylor 2007a). Some crews were even locked in for over two weeks (Canada.com 2007). The Canadian Coast Guard had to evacuate over 60 sealers, while many more needed food supplies (Spiegel Online 2007c; Western Star 2007). Over 100 of these ships had to be rescued by ice breakers of the Canadian Coast Guard (Branswell and Meaney 2007). The ice conditions were so severe that

even the icebreakers were locked in at times (Taylor 2007a; Taylor 2007b). Even though the situation was extremely dangerous for the sealers and the rescuers, the international reaction was not one of sympathy (Spiegel Online 2007a). It seems that some of the boycotters are reflecting this sentiment. That is, boycotter #168 (female, identified) exclaims: *This hunt is barbaric! I hear some of the "hunters" are trapped on the ice and have been for a week. Maybe there is justice in this world after all.* Likewise, boycotter #5235 (gender unknown, identified) states: *This continues to be a most barbaric disgusting and immoral act committed by CRIMINALS allowed to kill the innocent for greed!...I can only hope that the cycle of this year makes it worse for the killers than those they kill!....Too bad they weren't frozen in the ice for good...*

*Theme 18—Advise Fishermen to Find another Job:* One final recurring theme is that the fishermen really need to find other jobs. Boycotter #56 (female, identified), for example, states: *... our fishermen here are also going broke, but we would not stoop so low as to kill something so innocent and defenseless for any amount of money! Is it worth the few pennies you get [?], next time look a pup in the eyes as it cries for its mother before you kill it and then answer that question, if you need more money to sustain your family, be men and women get a real job, work hard, and leave innocent creatures alone!!!.* And boycotter #198 (male, identified) suggests: *You guys should be smart enough to learn another trade. It just isn't necessary and the writing on the wall is that there are fewer and fewer resources out there. Sooner or late you are going to have to stop anyway so why not stop while we still some vestige of nature left. You criticize Americans for their impact on the environment and then do stuff like this. PLEASE STOP!* This sentiment is echoed by boycotter #1189 (anonymous) who states: *Get out and get a real job like the rest of us. One that doesn't involve murdering animals, small or large. You people are strangely sick and sadistic.* And boycotter #12334 (gender unknown, identified) fails to show

any sympathy for the plight of the fishermen: *I'm 74, a Former Gunnery Sergeant, USMC, made an honorary Citizen of Ontario Province, spent more than a "few" bucks in a BEAUTIFUL country, Canada. "Hunt" for baby seals? I call stepping on them and beating the tar out of them with a ball bat, to death, sort of ignorant. All the "sob sisters" will call me bad things for not saying inhumane. Come on now, a ball bat, seal has no way to fight back, a "hunt," - JUST PLAIN IGNORANT. I live on Social Security pension ONLY, the VA won't pay my APPROVED pension for injuries from Korea in the Wartime. WHAT THE DICKENS AM I SUPPOSED TO DO, JOIN THE IDIOTS AND CLUB POOR ANIMALS TO DEATH WITH A BAT? The money "I have to make a living" story won't work with this old Marine. These "hunters" DO suffer from a disease called "NOGUTSATALL." Maybe I should forgive them?*

Some of the boycotters make specific suggestions as to where the fishermen/sealers should look for jobs. Boycotter #2074 (female, identified), for example, suggests ecotourism: *There are other more progressive ways to earn a living than this. Is this all Canada can offer such people for gainful employment???? How sad. This puts a disrespectful pallor on your country. People would pay more much more money to see these beautiful, innocent creatures in their natural habitat than know they are being murdered. ... Please put a stop to this disgusting, cruel, useless practice.* As a matter of fact, the IFAW began in the late 1980s, as an alternative to the seal hunt, to organize eco-tours to take tourists on seal watching ventures in Îles de la Madeleine, Quebec. By the late 1990s, these tours added annually about \$1 million CAD to the local economy (Canadian Geographic 2007). Ecotourism could be an important alternative to the seal hunt. That is, Newfoundland earns more money with whale-watching tours than with sealing (IFAW 2004).

Boycotter #10929 (female, identified) recommends: *This is a cruel and inhumane practice. How can hunters watch these animals suffer; they have a right to live. Leave the seals alone and go into the fake fur business.* Interestingly, boycotter #15124 (male, identified) remembers that this solution had been proposed a long time ago: *Whatever happened with that fake fur plant that was proposed (or was it built) in Canada to compensate for money lost from fur seal slaughter?* That is, in 1977, Franz Weber of the *Fondation Franz Weber*, offered to help the Newfoundland Government develop an alternative to sealing. The Fondation wanted to build a factory in Newfoundland to produce toys and clothing made of fake fur. Weber promised that the factory would provide permanent employment for 600 individuals (Blaskin 1977; Watson 2003), and annually produce merchandise worth about \$20 million CAD. Considering the Fondation's global network, Weber was able to virtually guarantee access to a world market, making such a factory more profitable than the seal hunt (Blaskin 1977) which is a seasonal activity and provides the equivalent of 100-150 full-time jobs (Southey 1997; Watson 2003). In addition, Weber offered a compensation of \$2.5 million CAD to the sealers (Watson 2003). Weber was turned down by the Canadian Fisheries Minister Romeo LeBlanc who stated that he would not be "blackmailed" (Watson 2003, 87)," and by the fishermen, one of whom stated on national television "We are going to fight it. We are going to fight for our way of life. And we will tell the rest of the world to stuff it" (Blaskin 1977, online).

And some boycotters have heard about another alternative offer made more recently. That is, boycotter #17156 (female, identified) recalls: *....I understand that people in Newfoundland have financial difficulties, but there have been serious offers to buy out seal licenses and assistance with the development of eco-tourism. Please don't let this blight Canada's otherwise benevolent reputation in the world. Please help both the seals and the*

*sealers. It is the role of humanity to be humane stewards of the world. ....* Incidentally, in 2006 Cathy Kangas, the founder and head of PRAI Beauty, offered to raise \$16 million CAD to help Canada end the seal hunt. A spokesman for Fisheries Minister Loyola Hearn rejected the offer, claimed that it was not enough to offset the losses if the seal hunt were to be abolished, and suggested that Kangas “put the money in another worthwhile cause” (BBC News 2006, online).

## **DISCUSSION**

When trying to answer the question whether the Canadian Seafood Boycott is effective, all that needs to be looked at is whether there is participation, no matter how small (Garrett 1987; John and Klein 2003). Considering that the HSUS alone has been able to attract close to about 445,000 boycott pledges on its website (HSUS 2007b) and over 50,000 on the boycott petition featured in the present research, it can be said that the boycott has been very effective so far.

Whether the boycott will be successful is another matter altogether since that is determined by whether Canada will agree to terminate the seal hunt for good. So far, Canada has not been willing to do so. To date, Canada has been fighting for its right to conduct the annual hunt and has through its actions attracted media attention to this matter. First, Canada invited foreign politicians and reporters to visit the ice floes in spring 2007 to observe first-hand that the seal hunt is conducted in a humane manner. A representative of the European Commission, however, reported that—regardless of the invitation—the Canadian Government had failed to make the floes accessible to the two veterinary experts sent to observe the hunt (Schally 2007). Likewise, even though European reporters were treated to an all-expense trip, none of them actually managed to witness the seal hunt (CBC News 2007a; CBC News 2007b). Second, as mentioned before, the Canadian Government has been sending a delegation to foreign countries trying to convince foreign politicians that the seal hunt is conducted in a humane manner

(Canadian Press 2007; Fur Institute of Canada 2007; IFAW 2007a). The delegation, however, has been met with little success. In the U.S., Senate Resolutions 33 (2005) and 118 (2007)—Urging the Government of Canada to End the Commercial Seal Hunt—show that the Canadian Government has not been able to turn the table. This, however, has not stopped the Canadian Government from trying to get the U.S. to relax the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 that has effectively closed the market to any type of products derived from seals. That is, the Canadian Federal Government has been working with provincial governments on “developing a plan in an effort to open the U.S. market to Canadian sealing products” (Fisheries and Aquaculture Management 2002, online). In Europe, the Canadian delegation has been met by utter disbelief. As stated by The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (2006, online), “the Canadian Government claims to enforce ‘acceptably humane’ hunting methods, whereas many films and news reports together with eyewitness accounts by credible individuals (including members of the European Parliament and of national parliaments, journalists, NGO representatives and representatives of European veterinary federations) show that seal hunting is carried out using extremely cruel methods that inflict severe, needless suffering on these marine mammals.” As a matter of fact, more and more European countries are closing their markets to seal products (IFAW 2007a). The Canadian Government has, in answer to these developments, turned to the World Trade Organization to force open the European markets. The EU has decided to defend its member states while continuing to study whether it should introduce an EU ban on seal products (Klapper 2007). Considering that Clouder and Harrison (2005) have warned that insufficient and/or insulting responses to a boycott can lead to aid NGOs in the recruitment of new members to the cause, the latest moves from the Canadian Government could conceivably backfire.

Another point worth discussing is why consumers are boycotting on behalf of the seals and what impact that will have on their boycott behavior. Here, some of Friedman's findings (1999) are relevant. That is, since the boycotters feel that the Canadian Government and fishermen are violating animal rights, the Canadian Seafood Boycott can be considered a boycott of conscience (Friedman 1999), or, as stated by Smith (1987), a moral act by consumers who feel it is their moral duty to disassociate themselves from the boycott target in order not to taint themselves. That means, according to Friedman (1999), that Canada might be playing a dangerous game. The degree of hostility against the boycott target caused by such boycotts is generally very high. Further, the stigma is likely to haunt the target for years to come. This can negatively affect retail sales on two levels. First, retailers who discontinued the target's products will be reluctant to restock even after the boycott has been called off, because they might be afraid that the boycott will be reestablished at some time in the future. In addition, we suggest that it is probably very likely that the retailers that discontinued carrying the target's products will already have built relationships with new suppliers that carry substitute products and might be reluctant to sever these new relationships. Second, Friedman (1999, 42) suggests that those customers who had to switch stores during the boycott so they could find substitute products might, "simply through inertia," stay with the new retailers instead of reviving old shopping habits. We further suggest that it is also likely that some of these consumers might actually prefer the shopping environment they were forced to discover so they could participate in the boycott and see no reason to return to previously preferred retailers and products, whereas some might remain frustrated with their prior retailers for not having participating in the boycott, whereas others might have a lasting negative impression of the boycott target so that they would not consider ever returning to purchasing the target's products.

## CONCLUSION

Considering the increasing momentum of the anti-sealing movement—which, as the reader might have noticed, displays many similarities with the movement that started in the 1960s—it might be worthwhile for the Canadian Government to consider an end to the seal hunt. As the data analysis shows, a number of alternatives to the seal hunt have been offered throughout the years, and there seems to be no end to outsiders coming up with suggestions. A particular interesting solution that ties into the growing cruelty-free movement was a request made by a German bedding manufacturer that involved the brushing of the moulting whitecoats. To be specific, in March 1994, Mr. Tobias Kirchhoff, owner of Kirchhoff Bettwarenfabrik in Munster, Germany, tried to obtain samples of seal hair to test its usability as filler material. In March 1996, Mr. Reinhard Olle of ORIGO, Germany, a large retailer specializing in natural and cruelty-free products, contributed \$10,000 toward the testing of the seal hair. Neither the Canadian Government nor the sealers were interested in the project at that time (Watson 2003). Taking into account that both gentlemen are involved in either the manufacture or retail of high quality bedding, and feature cruelty-free luxury comforters filled with alpaca, cashmere, or camel fibre, it might be prudent to revisit the financial potential of such an industry. The development of such an industry could be financed by following a suggestion made by the online version of *The Economist* (economist.com 2007) which it considers to be “the very least bad for Canada’s brand.” Accordingly, instead of selling the sealing licenses to sealers, the licenses should be auctioned off to the highest bidder. Chances are that the animal welfare and animal rights organization would win the bids, and the moneys raised could be used to provide alternate sources of employment for the fisheries.

*“Every buyer ... determines in some degree the direction of industry. The market is a democracy where every penny gives the right to vote.”*

*Frank A. Fetter (1907; 394)*

## APPENDIX A

### THE OTHER FOUR SEALING NATIONS

The Norwegian Government, which blames seals for the diminishing commercial fish stock and for causing damage to coastal communities, is also very open about subsidizing the industry (Norwegisches Ministerium for Auswaertige Angelegenheiten 2007) and allows tourists to participate in the hunt (Ministry for Fisheries and Coastal Affairs 2005). Norway has set the TAC at 46,200 seals for the year 2007. The European Union has severely criticized Norway for its seal hunt on numerous occasions (The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 2006).

Little information can be found on Russia's seal hunt. However, it seems that the seal hunt is controversial among Russians. In January 2000, the Russian Parliament passed a bill with 273 to 1 votes to ban the seal hunt, but the bill was later vetoed by President Vladimir Putin (Marinebio.org 2007). The seal hunt is subsidized by the government and is targeted mostly at whitecoats (harp seal pups up to 12 days of age which are still nursed by their mothers). The annual quotas for recent years have been estimated to be within the 60,000 to 80,000 range, and it has been reported that many of the seal pelts are being sold to Norwegian processing plants (Socio-Ecological Union 2007). The Russian hunt has been harshly criticized by The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (2006), and recently a group of Russian citizens have started to organize letter- and telegram-writing campaigns to President Putin. Further, children are encouraged to draw pictures and mail them to the President (Socio-Ecological Union 2007).

The Canadian Government reports that Greenland's annual catch of harp seals has increased to approximately 80,000 seals (Fisheries and Aquaculture Management 2002). This

seal hunt is subsidized by the Government of Greenland through direct subsidies on seal pelts and through the operation of a tannery and production facility that is dedicated to the manufacture of fashionable fur products (Canadian Institute for Business and the Environment 2001). Seals in Greenland are hunted throughout the summer months (IFAW 2005a), and all seal pelts that are exported are designated for the Danish market (The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 2006).

In Namibia it is the Cape fur seal that is hunted. In 2007, the Government of Namibia announced an annual TAC of 80,000 pups and 6,000 adult males that will be in effect for the next three years (Mukumbira 2007). Considering that the total Cape fur seal population at Namibia's Skeleton Coast has been estimated at 750,000 to 850,000, this seal hunt appears to be the largest in terms of the percentage of the population it targets, even though by total number it ranks second after Canada's (Mukumbira 2007; Nolen 2007). Apparently, the seal hunt employs about 140 unskilled workers for approximately five months out of the year, and earns the country a total of \$100,000 in exports (Momberg 2007). Interestingly, Namibia seems to be the second sealing nation—after Norway—where tourists are invited to participate in the hunt (Weidlich 2007). For many years, the Namibian seal hunt remained unnoticed by the rest of the world. This year, the tide has changed, and one of the most outspoken critics of this hunt—besides Francois Hugo of Seal Alert South Africa and the team of Seal Alert Netherlands (<http://www.sealalert.org/>)—is a member of the Canadian press, namely *The Globe and Mail* (Nolen 2007). Nolen (2007) states that last year's hunt had to be called off early simply because the hunters were running out of pups to kill. Those who had been able to flee into the water starved to death since they had not been weaned yet and were unable to fish to feed themselves. Their bodies later washed ashore along the coastline. Part of the attention paid to the hunt this

year seems to be due to calls for boycotts of Namibian tourism, diamonds, and beef until the hunt is stopped permanently (Sibeene 2007).

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Table 1

## Boycotters' Countries of Origin and Number of Boycotters Per Country

Country of Origin	N	Country of Origin	N	Country of Origin	N
No country of origin named	3	Ghana	1	Portugal	92
Albania	1	Greece	107	Puerto Rico	19
Algeria	1	Guatemala	4	Qatar	3
Argentina	44	Honduras	2	Reunion	1
Armenia	1	Hong Kong	11	Romania	30
Australia	217	Hungary	17	Russian Federation	4
Austria	43	India	30	Saint Kitts And Nevis	1
Barbados	1	Indonesia	5	Senegal	1
Belgium	121	Iran, Islamic Republic Of	2	Serbia And Montenegro	16
Bermuda	1	Ireland	34	Singapore	21
Bolivia	8	Israel	22	Slovakia	2
Bosnia And Herzegovina	2	Italy	241	Slovenia	13
Brazil	85	Jamaica	2	South Africa	40
Brunei Darussalam	2	Japan	11	Spain	165
Bulgaria	23	Korea, Republic Of	5	Sri Lanka	1
Cambodia	1	Kuwait	2	Sweden	59
Canada	480	Latvia	5	Switzerland	42
Cape Verde	1	Lebanon	3	Taiwan, Province Of China	6
Chile	11	Lithuania	10	Tajikistan	1
China	9	Luxemburg	3	Tanzania, United Republic Of	2
Christmas Island	1	Macao	3	Thailand	6
Columbia	23	Macedonia, Former Yugoslav Republic	6	Trinidad and Tobago	7
Costa Rica	14	Madagascar	1	Turkey	43
Croatia	14	Malaysia	22	Uganda	1
Cuba	1	Malta	4	Ukraine	1
Cyprus	3	Mexico	134	United Arab Emirates	6
Czech Republic	29	Moldova, Republic Of	1	United Kingdom	551
Denmark	25	Morocco	2	United States	46,218
Dominican Republic	1	Netherlands	132	U.S. Minor Outlying Islands	7
Ecuador	7	Netherlands Antilles	3	Uruguay	2
Egypt	2	New Caledonia	1	Vanuatu	1
Estonia	7	New Zealand	36	Venezuela	6
Ethiopia	2	Northern Mariana Islands	1	Viet Nam	2
Finland	21	Norway	14	Virgin Islands, U.S.	3
France	225	Pakistan	2	Zambia	2

Gambia  
Georgia  
Germany

1 Panama  
1 Peru  
216 Philippines

2 Zimbabwe  
44 **Total**  
17 *\*Boycotters are from 112 countries*

66  
1  
50,000

Table 2

## U.S. Boycotters' State of Origin and Number of Boycotters Per State

Rank	State of Origin	N	Rank	State of Origin	N
1	California	7,163	29	South Carolina	386
2	New York	4,182	30	Maine	346
3	Florida	3,285	31	Alabama	338
4	Texas	2,587	32	Kansas	318
5	Pennsylvania	2,061	33	Louisiana	313
6	Illinois	1,693	34	Hawaii	302
7	Ohio	1,691	35	New Hampshire	291
8	New Jersey	1,606	36	Iowa	280
9	Washington	1,303	37	Oklahoma	278
10	Michigan	1,280	38	West Virginia	251
11	North Carolina	1,224	39	Arkansas	212
12	Virginia	1,218	40	Rhode Island	204
13	Massachusetts	1,207	41	Idaho	197
14	Arizona	1,157	42	Vermont	189
15	Georgia	1,050	43	Mississippi	154
16	Colorado	1,026	44	Nebraska	153
17	Oregon	913	45	Delaware	139
18	Maryland	898	46	Alaska	126
19	Wisconsin	777	47	Montana	123
20	Indiana	741	48	Washington D.C.	78
21	Tennessee	663	49	Puerto Rico	74
22	Connecticut	650	50	South Dakota	72
23	Missouri	633	51	Wyoming	68
24	Minnesota	629	52	North Dakota	60
25	Utah	411	53	Armed Forces	24
26	New Mexico	406	54	Virgin Islands	12
27	Kentucky	396	55	Guam	2
28	Nevada	387	56	Northern Marina Islands	1