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The North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission

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EU import ban on seal products is a huge step backwards for sustainable development

The ban on the import of seal products into the European Union adopted by the Council on 27 July 2009 ignores and undermines the internationally recognised principles on which conservation and management of marine resources in the North Atlantic is firmly based. In addition, such a ban can have serious consequences for the economies of the many communities dependent on abundant seal stocks across the North Atlantic.

For the member countries of NAMMCO, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland, and Norway, as well as observer nations Canada, the Russian Federation and Japan, who participate actively in the scientific work of NAMMCO, this decision raises serious concerns for the future of international cooperation on responsible management and the sustainable use of renewable natural resources in general.

Such cooperation is based on mutual respect and recognition of the rights of all peoples to use their resources responsibly and sustainably for their economic development, including the right to benefit from international trade. The conservation and management of all living marine resources should be science-based and should take account of the marine ecosystems and the interrelation between species, stocks and habitats in which fishing and hunting activities occur.

The ban on the import of seal products into the European Community market is in direct contradiction to these fundamental considerations. It is not a tool to ensure the conservation of seal stocks, nor does it recognise the important work that has been undertaken in sealing communities around the North Atlantic to monitor and improve compliance with the strict standards of animal welfare that are required in the methods used to harvest seals. In short, the implementation of the ban into European Community legislation will represent a huge step backwards for sustainable development and international trade.

The nations cooperating through NAMMCO are all committed to promoting the principle of sustainable development in all areas of cooperation in the region, including the sustainable use of seals and international trade in seal products. Valuable initiatives taken through NAMMCO to enhance regional cooperation on conservation, management and research, such as the recent expert assessment of best practices in the hunting and killing of seals (February 2009), will continue to be strengthened in the future.

- NAMMCO is an international organisation for regional cooperation on research, conservation and management of marine mammals in the North Atlantic. NAMMCO is the only multilateral organisation of its kind which provides a forum for cooperation on the conservation and management of seals. The NAMMCO Management Committee on Seals and Walruses makes recommendations to its members for management measures for stocks of seals and walruses in the North Atlantic. The NAMMCO Committee on Hunting Methods is an expert forum which reviews developments in different hunting methods used in sealing and whaling and coordinates international assessments of their efficiency. For further information, including the expert assessment of best practices in seal hunting, see www.nammco.no.

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