

DR. CAROLINE LUCAS

**Green Party MEP
for the South East of England**

Commissioner Stavros Dimas
Commissioner for the Environment
European Commission
Rue de la Loi, 200
Bruxelles 1049

15 February 2007

Dear Commissioner,

Ban on seal products in the EU

Further to the Commission's response to the Declaration of the European Parliament on banning seal products in the European Union*, which was supported by 425 MEPs and adopted on 26th September 2006, I would like to raise some further points for your urgent consideration.

Within a matter of weeks, this year's seal hunt is due to begin. Although the quota has not yet been set, it is likely that around 200 000 seal pups will be killed. The suffering for seals - both mothers and young - will be immense.

In your response to the Declaration, you confirm that the Commission 'is strongly committed to high animal welfare standards both within the EU and at international level'. This is of course most welcome, not least because such a commitment is clearly needed in order to respond adequately to the level of concern for animals demonstrated by European citizens. I receive, on a daily basis, numerous requests from my constituents to ensure that the highest possible standards of animal protection are enforced.

However, I was disappointed to learn from your response that the Commission feels the need to 'take necessary measures to ascertain the use of humane hunting standards'. Having studied the wealth of material that already exists on this subject, I am satisfied that the seal hunt employs methods of killing that are unacceptable. Indeed, there is a large body of evidence, including film footage, demonstrating that pups are often struck repeatedly before being rendered unconscious, and that they may even be skinned alive. This killing of pups, as is well documented, takes place as mother seals watch helplessly.

I have recently been informed that the Commission now intends to request a new study to investigate killing methods and other issues connected with the potential suffering of individual seals. Apart from the likely cost to EU citizens of conducting such a study, this further delay in responding to the Declaration will cost lives and cause suffering. I believe that more rapid action is necessary, and that an immediate response to the written declaration would be both timely, and in line with the Commission's commitments on animal welfare.

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For those reasons, I call upon the Commission to impose an immediate moratorium on the import, export, and trade in seal products.

I wish especially to emphasise the urgency of the need for action: we have an opportunity to reduce the number of pups killed this year, and the Commission has an opportunity to respond positively and decisively to the request made by MEPs who signed the Declaration.

In seeking an immediate moratorium, I would also like to draw your attention to the current situation regarding the proposed ban on the trade in dog and cat fur. The Commission has rightly responded to public concern by bringing forward a legislative proposal, in part due to the mounting pressure exerted following adoption of a number of national bans.

Through my work on the cat and dog fur proposal, including producing a draft opinion for the Committee on International Trade, I am, of course, aware that the arguments in favour of the cat and dog fur ban, and for a similar ban on seal products, are closely related. Calls for these bans are motivated by a high level of public concern for the suffering of animals, and in relation to both, there has been significant action taken at member state level. You will be aware that in 2005 Italy introduced a temporary ban on products derived from seals whilst in January 2007 the Belgian Parliament adopted a permanent ban. The Netherlands is likely to legislate against these products in the near future and other countries are considering similar legislation. Only last week, the UK Minister for the Environment made public the UK's intention to encourage the EU to introduce a ban as soon as possible. I believe that action taken by member states serves to underline the need for an EU-wide response, and, together with the Declaration and the ban on seal products called for through the Parliament's resolution on the protection and welfare of animals 2006 - 2010, provide you not only with ample grounds on which to pursue an immediate moratorium, but a very strong argument against delaying legislative action while a new study is carried out.

Lastly, may I add two questions: if, following consideration of all of the above, the study is nevertheless to go ahead, please would you estimate the length of time it will take for the new study to be completed, and secondly, please would you estimate the expected cost of the study?

I do hope that you will support me in seeking a more timely and effective response to the Written Declaration, and would very much like to arrange a time to meet with you to discuss these matters. In the meantime please allow me to emphasise once more my appreciation of the work carried out by the Commission to promote high animal welfare standards.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Caroline Lucas MEP

Letter also sent to Commissioner Markos Kyprianou