

Seal Hunters and Protesters Clash North of Newfoundland

By Reuters

Angry confrontations between seal hunters and groups protesting against the commercial killing of the animals marked the opening yesterday of the seal-hunting season on ice floes 100 miles north of the tip of Newfoundland.

In one incident, Canadian fishing authorities seized a helicopter that the leader of one protest group said he had used in "dogfights" with federal fisheries helicopters.

A second group, the Vancouver-based Greenpeace Foundation, said four of its members had halted a Norwegian ship.

The annual killing of seals is viewed by Newfoundlanders as a risky but profitable adventure and by its foes as a cruel rite in which the animals are put to death.

Hunters kill the seals with wooden clubs and Norwegian slaughter instruments with weighted ends.

Canada's Fisheries Service estimates that this year, almost a million seals, including perhaps 300,000 pups, are on the ice north of Newfoundland and in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

The hunt was to concentrate at first on seal pups about two weeks old, whose pelts sell for about \$25 each. The thick layer of fat on the carcasses is used to produce cosmetics and for food oils.

Both protest groups have said they were not protesting against the hunt by the residents of northern Newfoundland, who work from the shore, but only against "the big commercial fleets."

In one of the protests, the Greenpeace Foundation said in a statement telephoned to the Reuters office in New York that "expedition leader Paul Watson physically carried an 80-pound baby seal out of the way of the Norwegian sealing ship, saving it from being crushed in the ice."

"At one point, four Greenpeaceers grouped in a line and brought the Norwegian ship to a halt," the statement said. "At another point, they grouped in a line so that the entire seal-hunting crew moved back from a patch of roughly two dozen baby seals who were otherwise completely vulnerable."