

# Canada Inuits reach EU deal to resume seal-product exports

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A seal pup lays on an ice floe on March 31, 2008 in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence near Charlottetown, Canada during the country's annual seal hunt

The Canadian government on Friday announced an agreement with the European Union that will let Inuit people resume the exportation of seal products, which have been the subject of an EU ban since 2009.

Under pressure from animal rights groups, Brussels banned seal imports

five years ago but the ban included an exemption for seal products derived from hunts traditionally conducted by Inuit and indigenous communities for subsistence.

It has taken until now to reach a deal on the interpretation of the exemption.

According to a joint statement by Canada and the European Union released by Canada's foreign affairs ministry on Friday, the two sides reached an agreement recognizing the "importance of preserving traditional ways of life in indigenous communities."

The agreement includes a provision to allow non-indigenous Canadians and groups to process, manufacture and market seal products harvested by indigenous Canadians.

"This joint statement charts out the course for greater market access for Canadian seal products and will help [indigenous communities](#) that depend on the seal hunt to provide for their families and maintain their traditional way of life," Canadian Environment Minister Leona Aglukkag, who is herself of Inuit descent, said in a statement.

Decried by Canada and Norway, the European ban has been upheld twice by the World Trade Organization.

The deal between Ottawa and Brussels comes after the two trading partners last month formally concluded a huge free-trade pact, planned to come into force in 2016.

"Sealing is a vital part of the economy in Inuit communities and has a significant impact on the economic and social well-being of Inuit," said Cathy Towtongie, president of the Inuit group Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated.

"I welcome Canada's discussions with the EU that aim to provide Inuit with direct access to the EU market and to overcome domestic infrastructure and other barriers faced by Inuit," she added.

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