

EU parliament strengthens seal hunt ban

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People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) activists stage a demonstration against seal hunting in front of the World Trade Organization headquarters on February 18, 2013 in Geneva

European lawmakers voted overwhelmingly on Tuesday to strengthen an EU ban on seal products, narrowing exceptions made for Canada's indigenous Inuits.

The European Union has banned the trade on [seal products](#) since 2009 but maintained exceptions for products resulting from indigenous hunts

as well as activity intended to help maintain [fish stocks](#).

At a plenary session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, MEP's voted 631 in favour of the changes, 31 against and 33 abstentions.

The original ban, which came into effect in 2010, was challenged by Canada and Norway at the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which ruled against the hunting nations on the basis of animal welfare in a landmark decision.

However, in the ruling, the WTO demanded more clarifications on the exceptions applied.

To address those concerns, the European Commission, with the backing of EU governments, proposed the amendments put to a vote on Tuesday.

Under the changes, Inuits will be allowed to sell seal products in the EU only if their hunting methods observe animal welfare, are clearly part of their tradition and contribute to the indigenous group's subsistence.

The exception involving the protection of fish stocks has been removed.

"MEPs have done the right thing today by standing up for [animal welfare](#) and EU public morality," said Joanna Swabe, executive director of the Humane Society International.

The changes now only require formal approval by EU governments and a final greenlight by parliament in order to come into force.

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