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UNDERCOVER FILMING EXPOSES INHUMANE KILLING OF CAPE FUR SEALS

Covert filming released by the Captain Paul Watson Foundation today shows a secretive seal cull industry with scant regard for animal welfare, following filming of the slaughter of Cape fur seals at Cape Cross Seal Reserve in Namibia this October.

Investigations were last undertaken over a decade ago and showed untrained workers leaving seals injured and dying on killing beaches. However Namibian authorities have repeatedly refused to permit independent monitoring of the sealers’ activities, claiming government appointed inspectors are sufficient to ensure a swift and humane death.

Advancements in drone technology has enabled the launch of Operation Silent Seals, with a specialised undercover crew entering Namibia to monitor and document the cull at Cape Cross Seal Reserve. Despite difficult operating conditions, the team were in place from the start of the cull, documenting the process over an extended period in order to assess whether the guidance put forward by the Namibian Ombudsman to improve the humaneness of the cull was being followed.

A Captain Paul Watson Foundation undercover operative commented “When agreeing to undertake the investigation, I was aware that previous monitoring attempts had been met with violence but when an industry is *this* secretive, it means they probably have something to hide.”

Whilst the full results of the investigation are yet to be published, an initial short video has now been released, showing a lack of compliance with the regulations: seals shot but left alive and ignored, and government appointed inspectors failing to approach and examine individual animals.

Continues…

“What really concerned me when I watched the footage, is that there appears to be clear violations of Namibia’s own legal regulations pertaining to sealing. These same issues were raised with the government over a decade ago and despite promises, nothing appears to have changed.” commented Nikki Botha of Captain Paul Watson Foundation South Africa. “The perpetual statement that killing is required because seals eat all the fish is still being given - despite scientific evidence showing that the seals in fact consume mostly fish that are NOT of commercial interest. We openly invite the Namibian Government to engage in dialogue with us in the hope that they will capitulate to reason.”

Namibia is the only country in the Southern Hemisphere to still undertake a legal cull – with nations such as South Africa having long since put protections for Cape fur seals in place. Despite this, the Namibian government claims the practice is essential to protect commercial fisheries and publicly refers to the annual slaughter as a ‘harvest’, with a total allowable catch (quota) of 80,000 pups and 6,000 bulls in place for 2023.

The fate of apex predators like Cape fur seals is critical to maintaining healthy ocean ecosystems. The oceans of the world are interconnected, with impacts in one part of the world having a knock-on effect across the wider ocean. With the footage obtained, the Captain Paul Watson Foundation South Africa, working alongside other organisations within Africa, will lobby for an end to the annual Namibian seal cull. More information on the animal welfare issues inherent to sealing and the wider negative impacts the industry has on a community is available from the website: [www.neptunespirates.uk](http://www.neptunespirates.uk).

Notes to editors

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The undercover element of Operation Silent Seals was undertaken by an international team of volunteers from South Africa, the UK, Norway and Austria. Members of the team are willing to be interviewed if anonymity can be assured.

Captain Paul Watson Foundation

We are a marine conservation charity on a mission to defend marine wildlife around the globe.

Our ethos:

* Our campaigns will be solely for the benefit of marine animals who are our clients.
* Our investigations will be followed by action, whether that be physical or legal intervention.
* We will never be subject to restrictive agreements with governments, our media and opinions will never be censored, and our crew will go where needed, even if they are unwelcome.

**If the Ocean dies, we die**

Operation Silent Seals

Additional footage will be released over the coming weeks. Please contact us on the details above to arrange advance access to this material.

Previous requests from NGOs to monitor the cull and ensure compliance with legislation and guidance have been refused. The call for improved animal welfare procedures is further complicated by Namibian legislation that does not classify seals as animals, therefore excluding them from existing animal welfare legislation.

Sealing in Namibian is very much an international business and we therefore call on the Nambian government for an immediate end to the cull.

Meantime, our team is asking the government of Namibia to:

1. Open the killing to observers to improve transparency
2. Reclassify seals as animals, with their slaughter required to comply with animal welfare legislation
3. Publish the decision making process behind the total allowable catch, with information provided on the methodology used to calculate the current Cape fur seal population in Namibia, details of how this work was funded, and declarations of the vested interests between the ministries and the seal cull industry
4. Commission a study on sealers and their communities to investigate the impacts of the sealing industry, giving particular attention to issues such as PTSD, domestic violence, substance abuse and work related injuries and illnesses
5. Give attention to the creation of higher-wage job opportunities through the maximisation of the existing potential for seal tourism

Cape Fur Seals and the Annual Cull

Cape fur seals (Arctocephalus pusillus pusillus) are the largest of all the fur seals and belong to the eared seal family (otariids). Adult males grow to lengths of 2.3-2.5 metres and weigh upto 300kg. Pup mortality is estimated at 30-50%, due to predation, disease and other factors. Life expectancy, for those that survive the early months, is around 20 years.

Males start to come ashore for breeding in October and remain until December. The seal population at Cape Cross is habituated to humans as a result of tourism, although some remain cautious on land. The cull season officially closes on the 15th November each year.

Historically culls were undertaken on a subsistence basis by local tribes and the animals provided a wide range of essential resources for survival such as skins, food and oil. In recent years Namibian officials have been placed under increased pressure to increase the annual quota by the firms holding killing concessions. 1990 saw just 715 bulls killed, compared to the 2023 quota of 6,000.

Those holding the concessions state that the increase is needed to make it economically viable whilst the belief among the fishing industry is that the cull is needed to protect fisheries. However whilst about ¾ of an adult seal’s diet is made up of fish, these consist of non-commercial species supplemented by squid, crabs and other crustaceans.

Henties Bay processing facility (owned by Seal Products pty) was originally designed for processing seals and producing value added products such as seal oil, fur products and shoes but since being taken over by Chinese interests, locals have stated that skins and meat are no longer made available within the community.