

*In association with Animal Alliance of Canada, Animal Protection Institute, Canadians for Furbearing Animals, World Animal Net, North American Pet Owners Alliance Inc., Aid For Animals, Inc., Vancouver Humane Society,*

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

*For Immediate Release*

### **DFO abusing science to sell seal hunt, groups charge.**

**(Toronto, 30 May 2005)** – Animal welfare and environmental protection groups around the world are calling on the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) to disclose how it determined that the Northwest Atlantic harp seal population managed to increase to the highest level ever reported, despite the DFO's vigorous attempts to reduce the harp seal's population by up to 30%.

In a press release dated 24 May 2005 DFO announced that the harp seal population now numbers 5.9 million animals – despite three years of the largest seal culls in half a century and a degraded marine ecosystem due to over-fishing, pollution, and climate change. The press release did not explain why the government had failed to achieve a major objective of its 2003-2005 management plan: to reduce the size of the population.

Dr David Lavigne, science advisor to the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), who has worked on harp seals for more than 30 years, said: “From a population biology viewpoint, the DFO's numbers are so unexpected that, before they can be accepted, the government scientists must fully disclose how they arrived at their figures and submit their data, analyses and models, to the wider scientific community for legitimate peer review. Until that is done, their claims do not exist in the realm of ‘real science’. Something seems seriously wrong, or scientifically fascinating. The last time seal culls were of the size witnessed in the past few years, the population declined by 50 – 66%. Now, as that experiment is repeated, the population is miraculously growing.”

Stephen Best, founding director of Environment Voters, said, “This isn't marine mammal science, its ‘political’ science. It is ‘science’ by press release – which, of course, is simply ‘junk science’ – and it is being done for no other reason than to sell the government's seal hunt policies. It is an abuse of conventional scientific methods and the public trust to issue so-called scientific findings and not to provide any backup documentation whatsoever.”

Rebecca Aldworth, Director of Canadian Wildlife Issues for the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) said, “Can you imagine how the DFO, the sealing industry, and the media would react if HSUS or IFAW scientists issued a press release that said the seal population had declined by two million animals and provided nothing to support the claim? They'd be outraged. They'd be calling us irresponsible and disreputable, and rightly so.”

– 30 –

#### **For more information, please contact:**

Dr David Lavigne, Science Advisor, International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW)  
519-767-1948

Stephen Best, Founding Director, Environment Voters  
519-925-3440

Rebecca Aldworth, Director, Canadian Wildlife Issues, Humane Society of the United States (HSUS)  
514-395-2914; 514-575-6797 (cell)