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Guelph workers don pirate garb to protest seal hunt

Local cosmetics shop staff taking part in chain-wide campaign against sealing

Mercury staff

GUELPH

Animal rights activists believe the death knell of the annual Canadian commercial seal hunt will soon be sounded.

A protest against the hunt is scheduled for today at the Lush Cosmetics store in the Stone Road Mall, part of a chain-wide, anti-seal hunt campaign in conjunction with Sea Shepherd Conservation Society. There have been a series of demonstrations across the country leading up to the hunt, which starts later this month.

A number of organizations are opposed to the hunt, and continue to push for a widespread boycott of Canadian seafood products to put pressure on the Canadian government to end a commercial hunt that many believe is barbaric. Most seal skins find their way into the European fashion industry.

The European Union will vote next month on legislation that would ban Canadian seal products. That would effectively close the largest market for Canadian seal skins. The hunt killed more than 250,000 newborn seals last year. Canada's largest markets for other seal products, such as Russia, China and Norway, are outside the EU. However, sealing industry experts fear a ban would curb the demand for sealskins from the fashion industry and disrupt shipping routes.

Employees of the local Lush Cosmetics store will wear pirate outfits today in support of Sea Shepherd, a marine wildlife conservation organization committed to ending the seal hunt, and to conserving and protecting the ecosystems and species of the world's oceans. Sea Shepherd is often referred to as the "pirates of compassion."

"Our employees are super excited about this," said Brianna Service, manager in training at Lush Cosmetics in Guelph. "We all work for Lush because we like the ethics involved in the company. Lush has a history of making a difference in other places, and I feel this is a good start for the store in Guelph."

Guelph's Karen Levenson is a director of Animal Alliance of Canada and Environment Voters. She is involved in campaigns to end Canada's commercial seal hunt.

"I think the hunt is definitely going to end," she said. "A number of organizations have come together to fight the seal hunt tooth and nail. It is not sustainable, and it is intensely cruel."

Levenson said main branches of the Canadian government, as well as the government of Newfoundland, heavily subsidize the seal hunt.

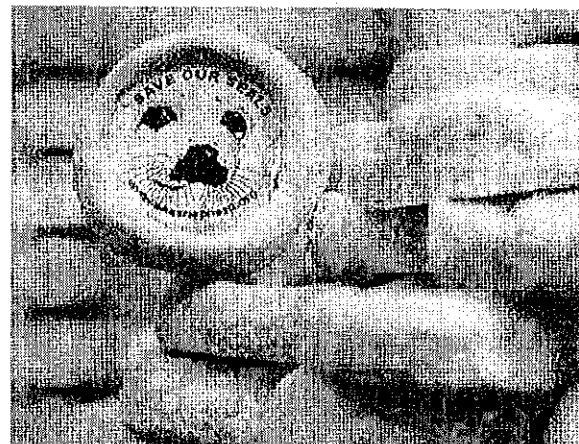
"If the government took those millions of dollars and put them into infrastructure and retraining, we would not have this problem," she said, adding governments persist in supporting the hunt for political, not economic reasons.

Lush has produced a body moisturizer and a new bubble bar in the shape of a baby seal especially for the campaign. All proceeds from the \$19.95 moisturizer and the \$6.75 bar will go to Sea Shepherd, Service said. All Lush products are 100 per cent vegetarian and 74 per cent vegan.

The store started a postcard campaign this week, and the response has already been strong from customers. About 50 postcards were filled out in the first two days of the week. They will be sent to Prime Minister Stephen Harper when the campaign is over.

The annual commercial harp seal hunt subsidizes the income of Canadian East Coast fishermen, who derive roughly five per cent of their income from the spring hunt, according to reports. Since 1978, sealers haven't been allowed to kill the youngest harps, called whitecoats, until their fur changes colour. That can be 12 days after birth but federal officials say most hunted seals are about 25 days old.

With Files From the Canadian Press



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