

Nikolas Sellheim, a postdoctoral researcher, has written a comprehensive monograph on the legal aspects of the deviating seal hunting regimes around the world. The book takes both a socio-historical and legal view on the marine mammal harvests, and does not shy away even from the most remote or obscure hunts, such as the Latin American or freshwater seal issues.

*The Seal Hunt* opens with an overview of the “troubled” relationship seals and humans continue to have. Main body of the book is divided into four big themes - being cultures and seal hunt, legal regimes, the EU and the seal hunt and ultimately the core theme of the book - the juxtaposition of international trade law, seals and moral questions.

Included in the reviews are 19 different national jurisdictions of seal hunt around the world. Most of them do not allow commercial hunts, exceptions being Canada, Norway and Namibia. Some countries such as Finland, Iceland and Sweden argue for a quota-based sealing on the “protection” of their fisheries and the impacts seals are having. Sellheim notes in his review of the changing national contexts that “seal hunt issue goes beyond national legislation and includes broad and diverging standards of rights and wrongs”. He also correctly positions seal hunt in the larger context of marine mammal harvests and the complexities they have in global governance. Author also in a clear and coherent manner describes and reviews the Indigenous harvests around the world, both past and present. For example Sellheim raises the Bering Sea sealing regimes “having set a precedence” with indigenous peoples and their rights. Most of the limitations have been removed for traditional harvests.

In the book a certain number of notable hunts emerge. Sellheim spends time on the Newfoundland hunt which has been the flashpoint of animal rights groups and “*birgitte bardot*” -style campaigns from Eastern Canada. Whilst the hunt goes forwards, the author points to one of the best managed natural resource regimes in place, that includes legally-binding animal welfare provisions, sealers’ training programmes and monitoring mechanisms in place to ensure a well-conducted harvest.

Another flashpoint, partly related to the Newfoundland sealing and its impacts, is the Inuit relationship and sealing issues, including a lengthy and much-needed review of the situation in Greenland. Sellheim discusses what he sees as an “inner European View on public

morality”, as a part of a lengthy process of EU - Greenlandic and EU - seal relations, if you will. Ultimately Sellheim deduces that the “EU clash” with seal hunting is centred around notions of what is seen as “inherently inhumane”. The International trade law becomes basis for some of the legal victories EU has over the seal skin product bans and associated processes.

Icelandic sealing is reviewed for its historical context and contemporary legal issues. However, we do not hear much of the living sealers voices in the book. For the interested parties, the recent [Nordic IPBES report, Vol 2, Geographical Cases](#) contains oral histories of the Icelandic subsistence sealers from the past 20 years.

Sellheim wrote much of his research in Northern Europe, including Finland and the context of Baltic Sea, and it is reflected in the level of details he is able to muster for his comprehensive review. For example it is rare to see accounts of Arvid Genetz on the Russian Sámi or reflections of the Kola Peninsula and 1751 legal context of trade, harvest and community rights. Clearly the author has taken the issues and the legal context to heart.

Throughout the book Sellheim also discusses the unique freshwater seals and their harvests, namely the lakes Saimaa and Ladoga in North-eastern Europe, and the lake Baikal situation (also bringing forth the crucial question - how did the seals end up so far inland at lake Baikal).

Most of the freshwater seal survey material points to urgent ecological crisis, especially in the context of the lake Saimaa seal, nowadays fully protected. Slight errors emerge in the numbers of the Saimaa seals (Sellheim argues for 150 living individuals, whilst the rebounding numbers are today closer to 400) but the main arguments are clear. He even goes out to point to the oral histories of the Evenki and Buryat peoples around lake Baikal as an important source of information about the seal and its life histories.

Sellheim also discusses the historical and present “technical” management treaties, such as the Russian - Norwegian and Russian - Finnish seal treaties as major confidence-building measures resting on their technical facilities and allowing dialogue to happen in a non-politicized environment.

Sellheim is able to convey a review of the governance of sealing well. And perhaps even more importantly he is able to convey the older relationship humans and seals continue to have, in the present so 'troubled', but a lengthy history indeed. All in all, tour de force of legal regimes and sealing globally, this book can be recommended to all experts and interested parties on sealing questions world-wide. A major achievement.

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