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[Press release](#) | 04.06.2015

Seal product trade ban

MEPs ward off immediate threat to EU ban but potential loopholes remain

The European Parliament's internal market committee today voted on proposals from the European Commission to adapt the EU's ban on the trade in seal products, with a view to making the ban properly compliant with World Trade Organization rules. Commenting after the vote, Greens/EFA spokesperson **Igor Soltes** said:

"With today's vote, we have warded off the immediate threat to the EU ban on the trade in seal products. However, a number of potential problems remain in the proposals and we hope these will now be ironed out in negotiations with EU governments, so we can ensure we have a watertight, WTO-compliant ban (1). The seal trade ban was a major animal rights achievement for the EU and we should ensure that this important and symbolic measure is maintained.

"Some Nordic MEPs had tried to introduce additional exemptions to the ban from what the Commission proposed (2). These exemptions would have allowed more products from seals onto the market and would have meant the EU ban would not be compliant with WTO rules, and as such would put the whole ban at risk. Thankfully, this move was rejected by MEPs.

"However the draft law voted today is far from being perfect, in particular because it creates confusion between moral concerns, which are the correct legal basis for the ban, and other, mainly socio-economic considerations. This confusion could still threaten the existence of the ban, and the Greens will work to improve this during the upcoming negotiations with the Council and ensure we have a fully watertight ban."

(1) The internal market committee voted on a proposal from the EU Commission to revise the EU rules banning the trade in seal products, which were adopted in 2009. The Commission's proposal aimed to maintain the ban, whilst ensuring it is fully WTO-compliant. Following challenges from Canada and Norway, the WTO said the EU could ban products on ethical grounds but outlined some necessary refinements. Following today's vote, negotiations will now begin with EU governments in Council to finalise the draft rules.

(2) Some Nordic MEPs tried to change the proposal by introducing an additional exemption from the ban (there is already an Inuit exemption foreseen). This Maritime Resources Management exception would make the ban incompatible with WTO rules. The MRM exception means that seals products coming from

hunts that are necessary in order to prevent overpopulation of seals can also be placed on the market. However, the WTO considered it impossible to practically distinguish between MRM and commercial hunting.

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Igor Šoltes

Member

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