

SEAL MEAT PROCESSING GUIDE



COMITÉ SECTORIEL DE MAIN-D'ŒUVRE
DES PÊCHES MARITIMES

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The Comité sectoriel de main-d'œuvre des pêches maritimes (CSMOPM) developed this Seal Butchering Guide in collaboration with expert butcher and hunter Réjean Vigneau and the Association des chasseurs de phoques intra-Québec. Its purpose is to provide a reminder regarding the guidelines for processing seals and transporting them to buyers to avoid any contamination in the meat or fat, so that humans can safely consume these products.

This guide is intended for commercial sealers, but it can also be useful for those who harvest seals for personal consumption. It is designed as a study companion for the Seal Handling and Processing course offered by the CSMOPM.

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With the financial contribution of:

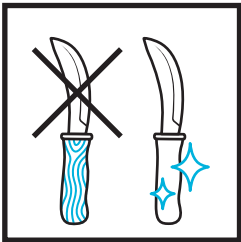
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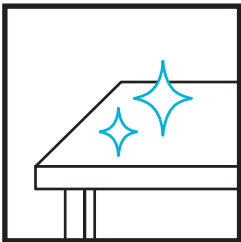
1. HAND WASHING

Wash your hands thoroughly before butchering or wear clean gloves.



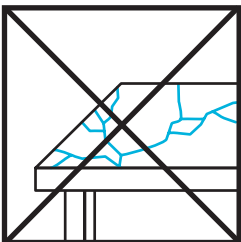
2. CLEAN KNIFE

Use a clean stainless-steel knife with a curved blade. Avoid wood-handled knives. Use two knives that can be easily distinguished from each other (with different-coloured handles, for example).



3. CLEAN SURFACE

Work on a clean surface. The inner surface of the seal skin is the ideal working surface, because it is naturally free of contamination.



4. CONTAMINATION

Avoid cross-contamination with paint or varnish.

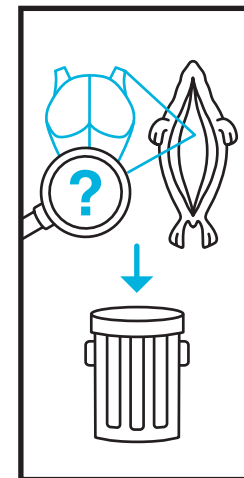
EXTERNAL EXAMINATION:

Before harvesting a seal, make sure it is healthy.

Healthy seals:

- Are plump
- Have clear eyes
- Have a healthy-looking coat
- Are free of skin sores or scabs (a well-healed scar is acceptable)
- Are on the lookout, behave threateningly or move away

INTERNAL EXAMINATION:



ORGANS

When butchering the seal, inspect the organs for signs of disease.

ABNORMALITIES

If the organs show any abnormalities, discard the entire carcass.

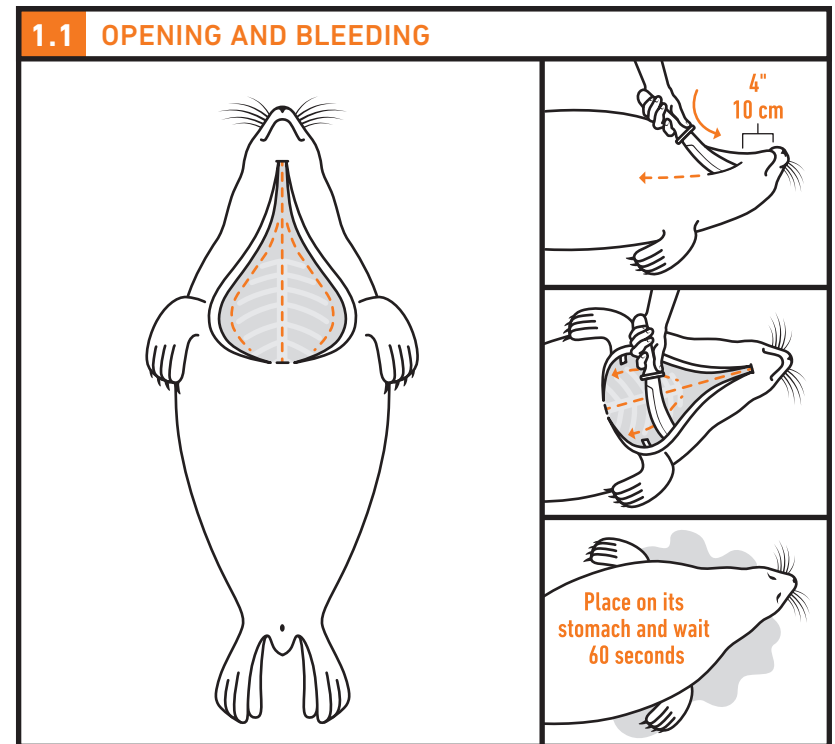
A comprehensive report entitled **Harvesting Seal Products of High Quality for Human Consumption** is available at:

<https://waves-vagues.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/Library/360812.pdf>.

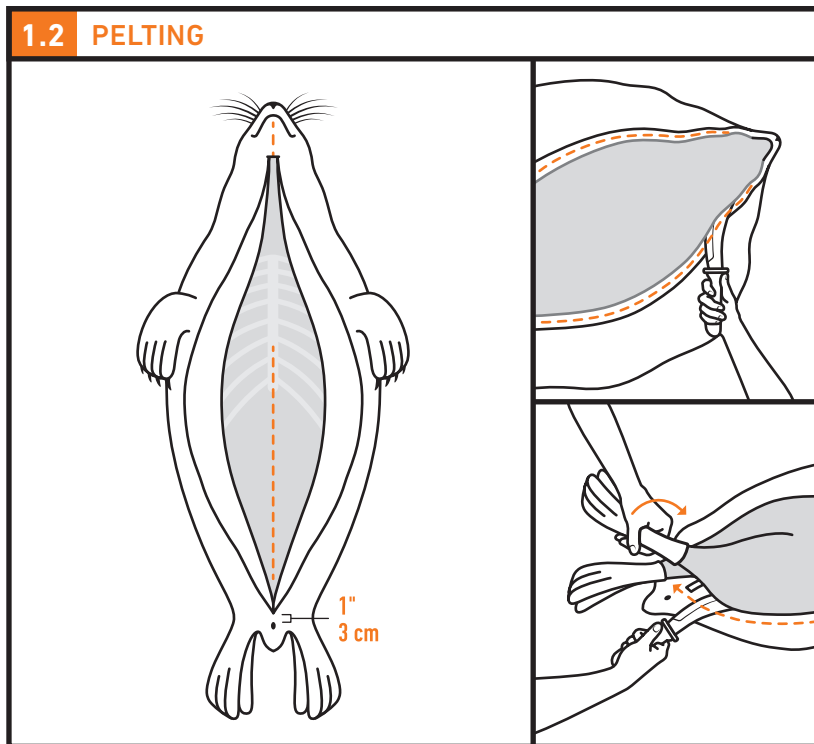
It is recommended reading for all sealers.

In this guide, a “young” seal refers to a seal that has been weaned, but that has not yet left the ice banks or firm land to go to the water.

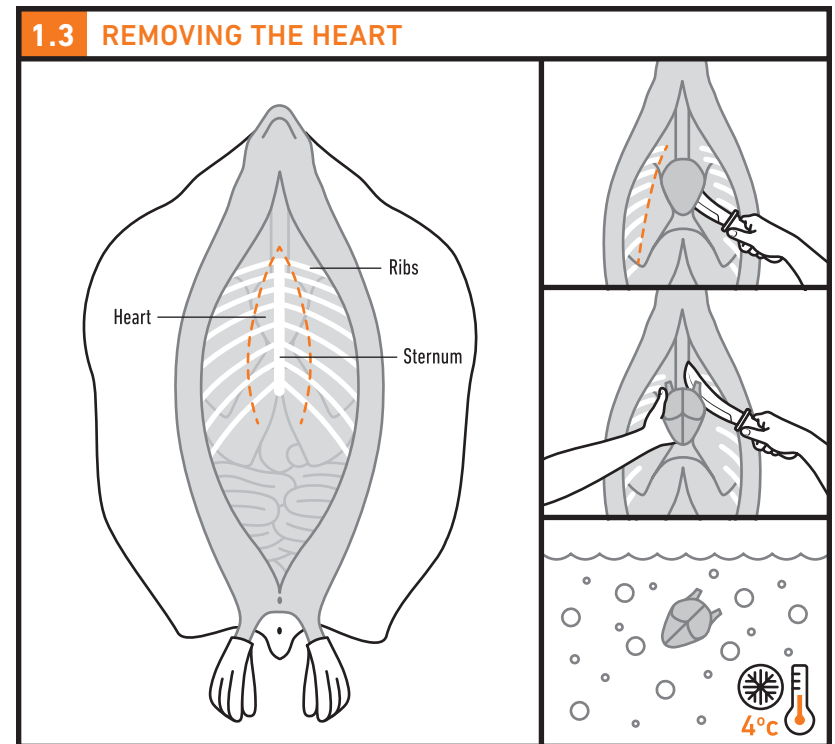
Since it is still very young and has not yet eaten fish, its offals have less pathogens and also less contaminants compared to adult seals.



- Perforate the pelt of the seal about 10 cm (4") below the lower lip.
- Slice through the pelt and fat down the middle of the body to the base of its armpits.
- Sever the two axillary arteries, located under the side flippers.
- Place the seal on its stomach for bleeding.
- Wait 60 seconds (minimum per federal regulations).



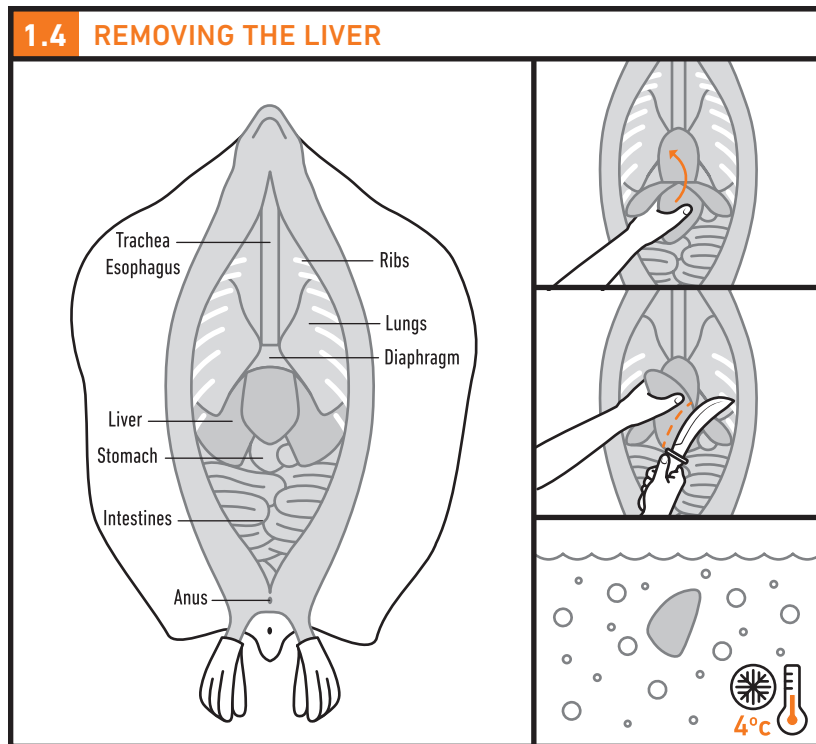
- Turn the seal over onto its back.
- Continue slicing down to 3 cm (1") above the anus.
- Remove the pelt and blubber from the carcass by sliding your knife along the connective tissues that separate the meat from the blubber.
- Leave as little blubber as possible on the carcass and as little meat as possible on the blubber.
- To remove the tail, twist it and give it a sharp blow with the heel of your knife.
- **Use a fresh knife for the following steps.**



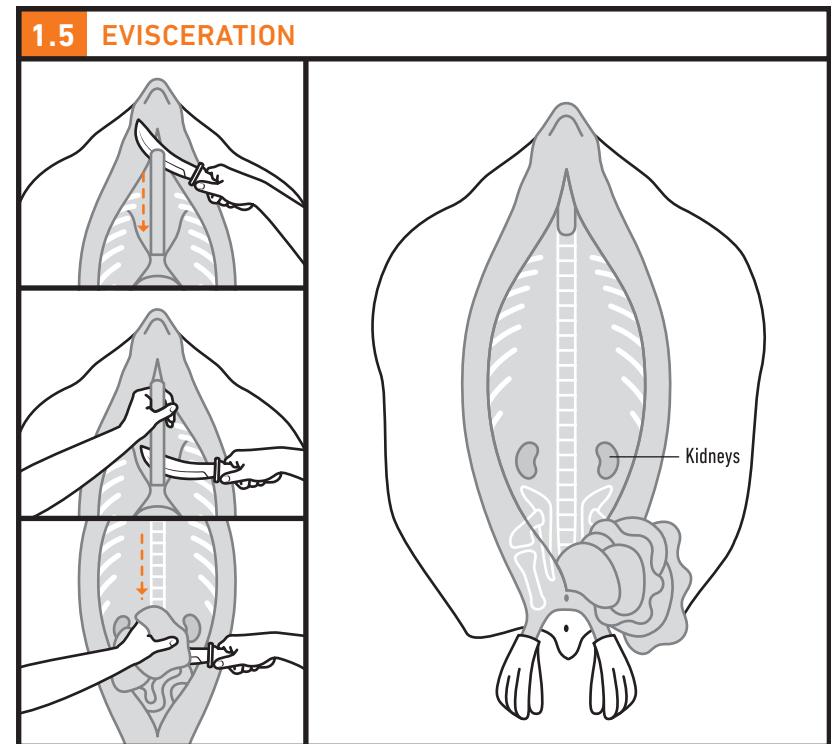
- Slice through the soft cartilage in the ribs to open the rib cage.
- Remove the sternum to create a wider opening and be careful not to cut yourself on the points of the ribs.
- Free the heart from its casing.
- Remove the heart and sever the large blood vessels attached to it.
- Place the heart in an insulated container filled with ice water.

NOTE:

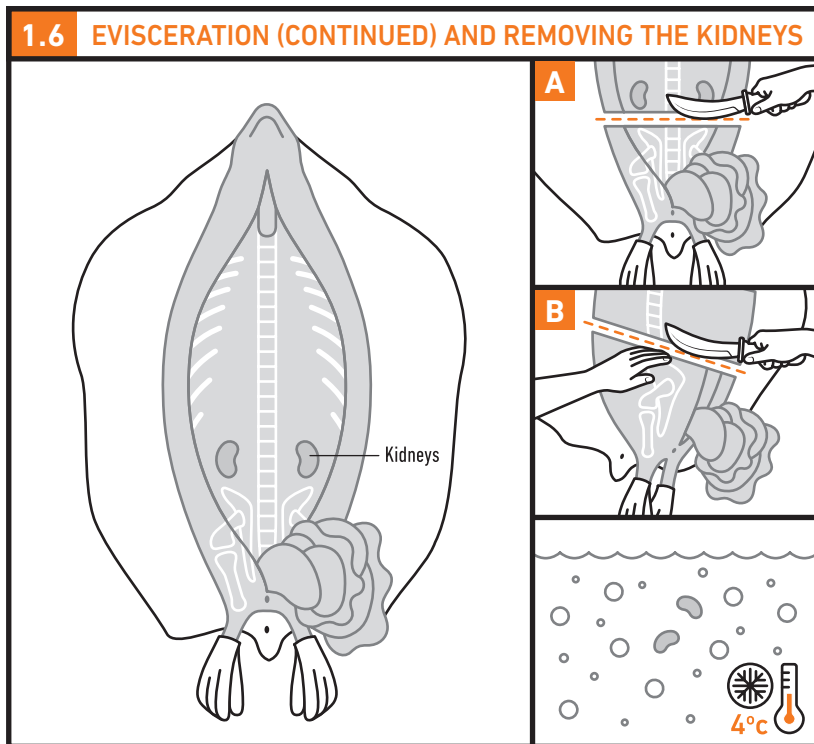
Have separate bins ready for each part of the seal (heart, liver, etc.)



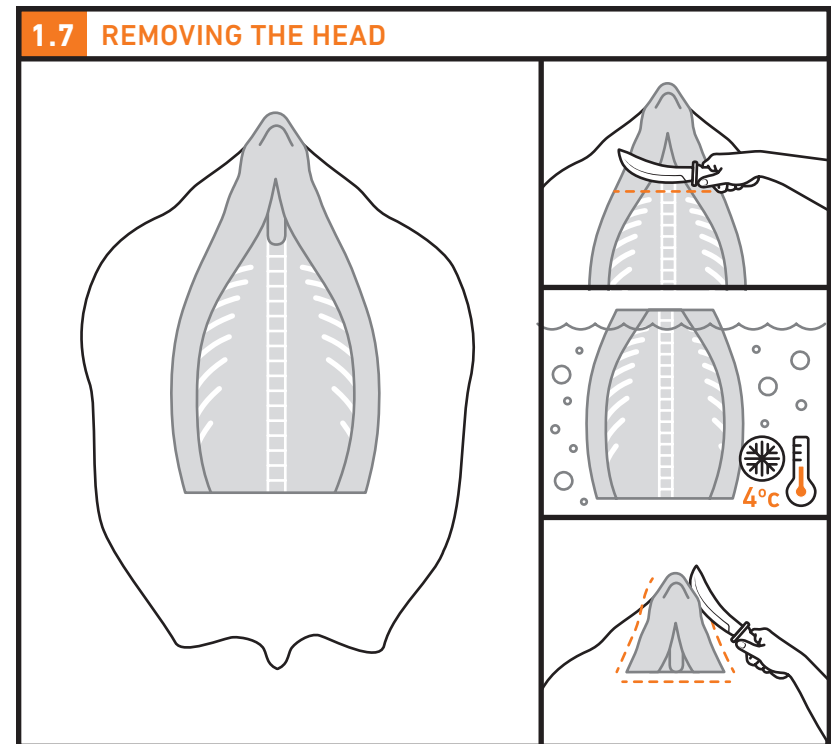
- Remove the larger lobe of the liver, located under the smaller lobes.
- Do not slice through the smaller lobes to avoid puncturing the gall bladder.
- If the gall bladder gets punctured, discard all the lobes of the liver.
- Place the large lobe in an insulated container filled with ice water.



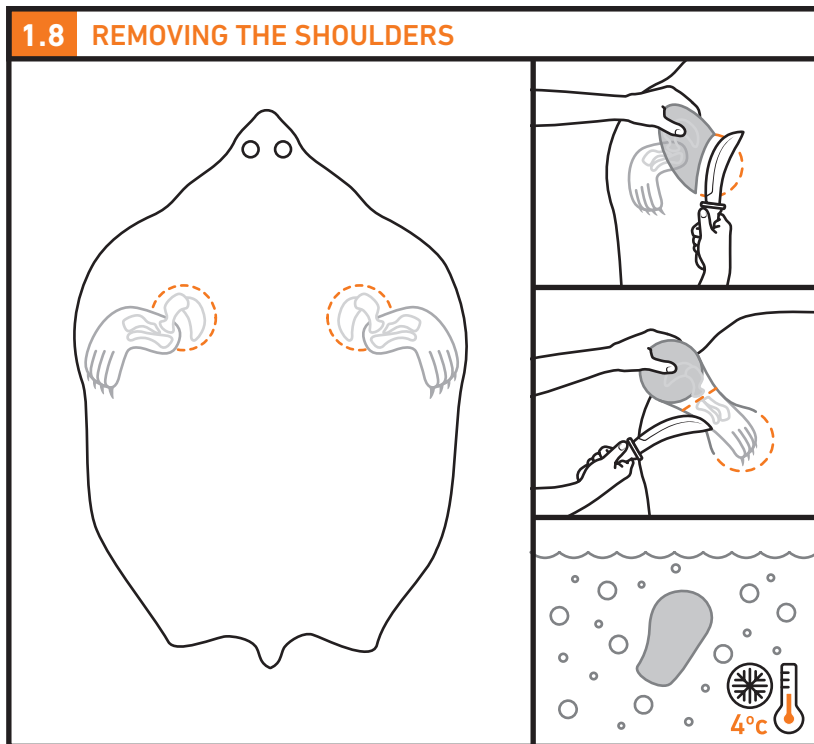
- Sever the trachea and esophagus at the throat.
- Holding the trachea and esophagus, pull the lungs out of the chest wall.
- Cut the diaphragm at its base.
- Remove the viscera (lungs, stomach, remaining liver, intestines, etc.) and place them on the side of the carcass.
- Leave the kidneys in place.



- **Option A:** Cut under the base of the kidneys, opposite the junction of two lumbar vertebrae.
- **Option B:** If the kidneys have already been removed, turn the carcass onto one side. Find the hip bone by touch, at the junction of two lumbar vertebrae. Cut right above the bone, between the two vertebrae.
- Discard the bottom of the carcass.
- Remove the kidneys and place them in an insulated container filled with ice water.



- Near the head, look for white spots marking the discs between two cervical vertebrae.
- Slice the head using a white spot as a guide.
- Place the carcass in an insulated container filled with ice water.
- Remove the head from the skin and discard the head.



- Cut off the flippers (side fins and shoulders) following the connective tissue.
- Apply circular knife blows while pulling on the flipper to release it.
- Remove the end of the flipper (part with fur) by giving it a sharp blow with the heel of your knife.
- Place the shoulders in an insulated container filled with ice water.

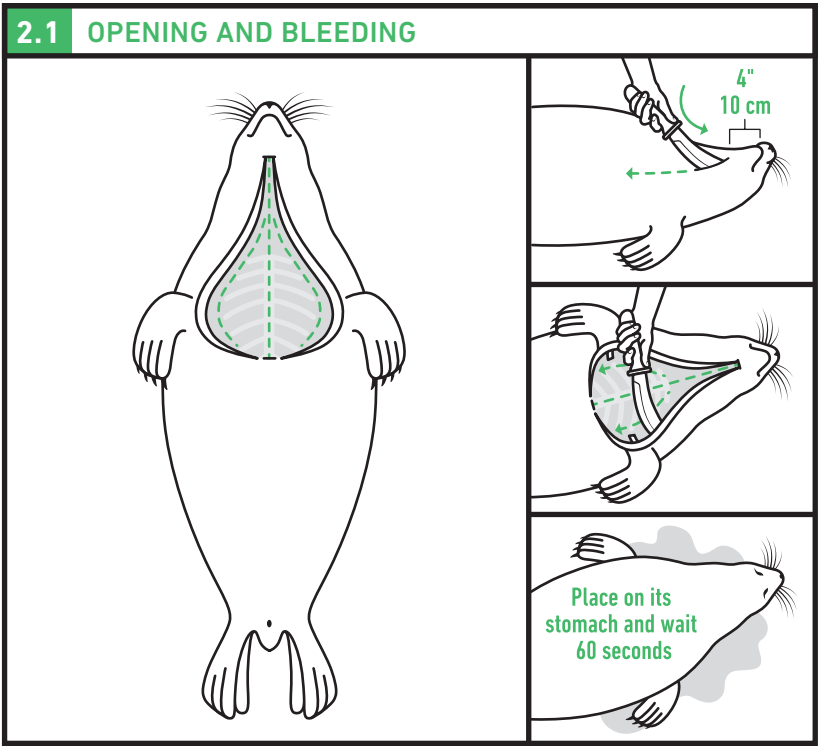
ONCE THE YOUNG SEAL HAS BEEN BUTCHERED:

See cooling, packing and health instructions on page 22.

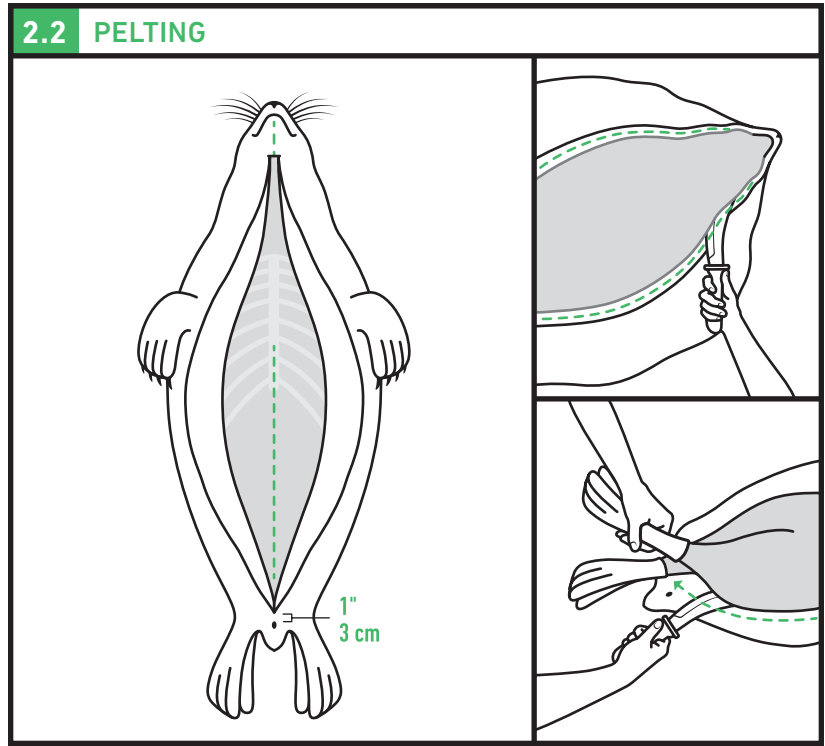
In this guide, an “adult” seal refers to a seal that has started going into the water and eating fish, regardless of its age.

Its offal may contain contaminants, which is why it is not kept.

2 PROCESSING ADULT SEAL MEAT

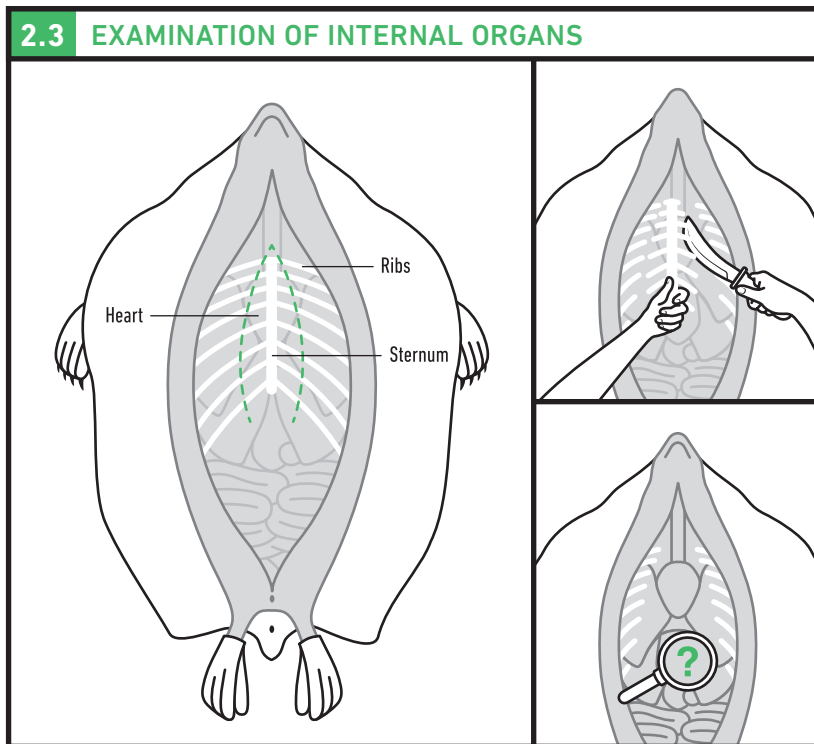


- Perforate the pelt of the seal about 10 cm (4") below the lower lip.
- Slice through the pelt and fat down the middle of the body to the base of its armpits.
- Sever the two axillary arteries, located under the side flippers.
- Place the seal on its stomach for bleeding.
- Wait 60 seconds (minimum per federal regulations).

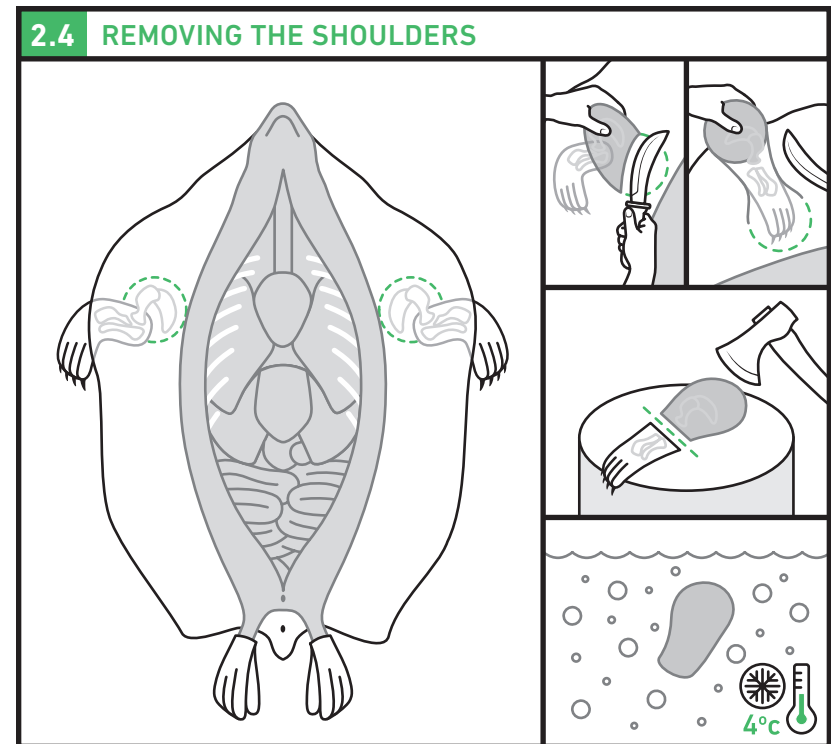


- Turn the seal over onto its back.
- Continue slicing down to 3 cm (1") above the anus.
- Remove the pelt and blubber from the carcass by sliding your knife along the connective tissues that separate the meat from the blubber.
- Leave as little blubber as possible on the carcass and as little meat as possible on the blubber.

2 PROCESSING ADULT SEAL MEAT



- Slice through the soft cartilage in the ribs to open the rib cage.
- Remove the sternum to create a wider opening and be careful not to cut yourself on the end of the ribs.
- Release the heart from its casing, which is attached to the sternum.
- Check the internal organs (heart, lungs, liver, intestines, etc.)
- If there are any abnormalities, discard the entire carcass. If not, continue butchering and discard only the unwanted parts.

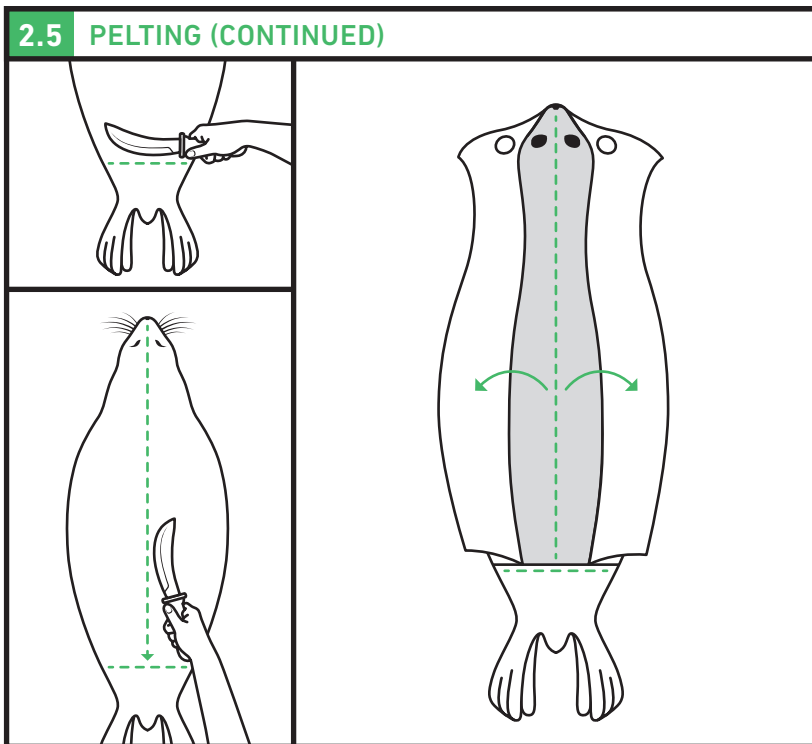


- Cut off the flippers (side fins and shoulders) following the connective tissue.
- Apply circular knife blows while pulling on the flipper to release it.
- Remove the end of the flipper (part with fur) by laying it on a log and chopping it off with an axe.
- Place the shoulders in an insulated container filled with ice water.

NOTE:

Use two separate containers for the shoulders and the loins.

2 PROCESSING ADULT SEAL MEAT



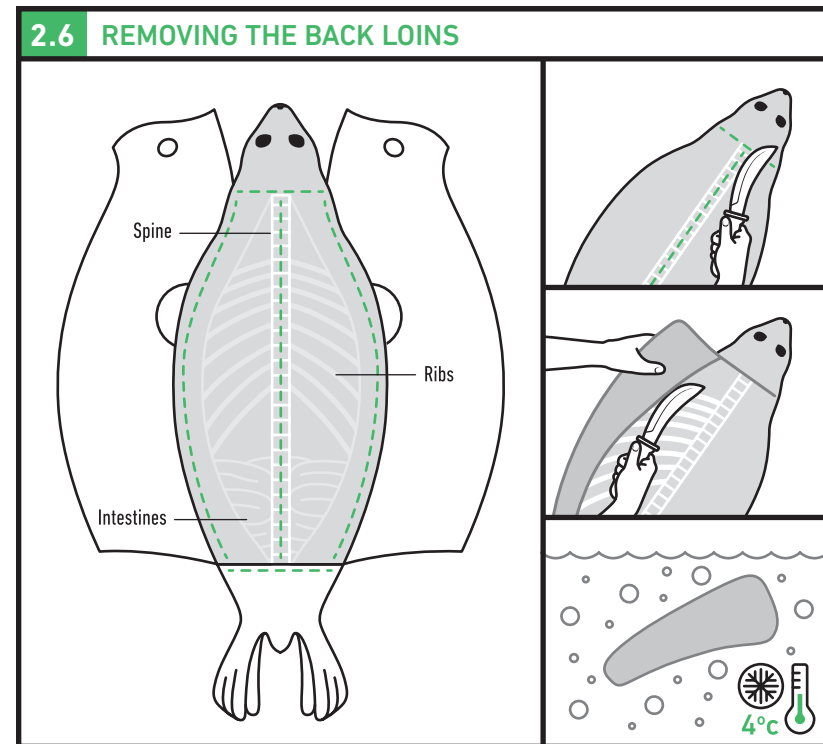
- Turn the seal over onto its stomach.
- Make a lateral incision in the pelt and fat at the hip.
- Slice the seal from the snout to the lateral incision, following the spine.
- Peel off the pelt and blubber on either side of the long incision.

NOTE:

You will end up with two pieces of pelt and blubber.

WARNING:

This pelting method is not optimal if you want to keep the fur intact. If needed, ask buyers about their needs first.



- Slice the back muscle along the spine.
- Follow the vertebrae and ribs to obtain a maximum of meat.
- Place the loin in an insulated container filled with ice water.
- Repeat to remove the second loin.

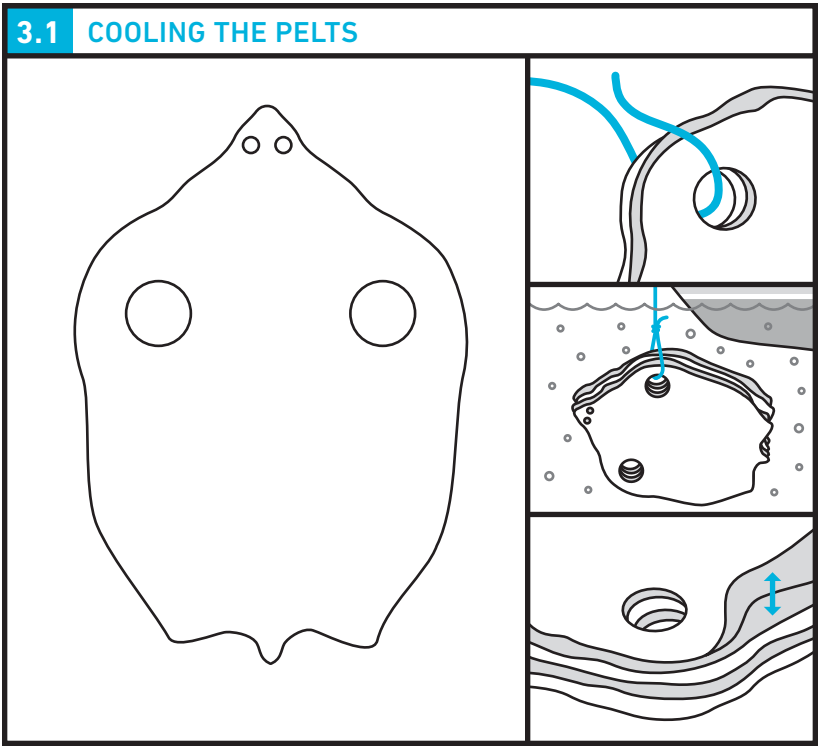
NOTE:

Be careful not to puncture the intestines below the ribs. The knife passes near the intestines.

ONCE THE ADULT SEAL HAS BEEN BUTCHERED:

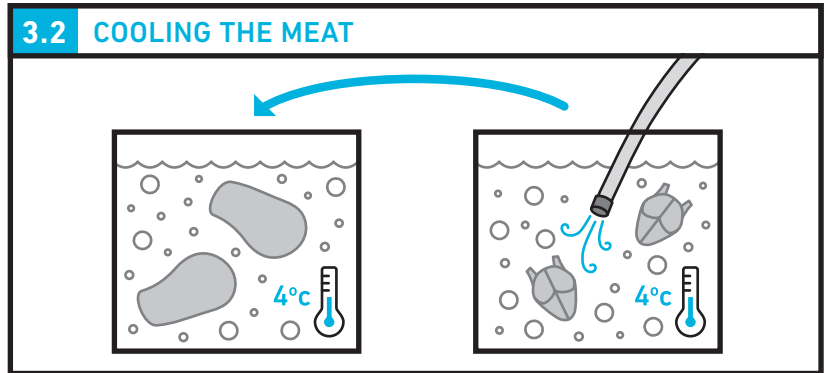
See cooling, packing and health instructions on page 22.

3 COOLING AND PACKING

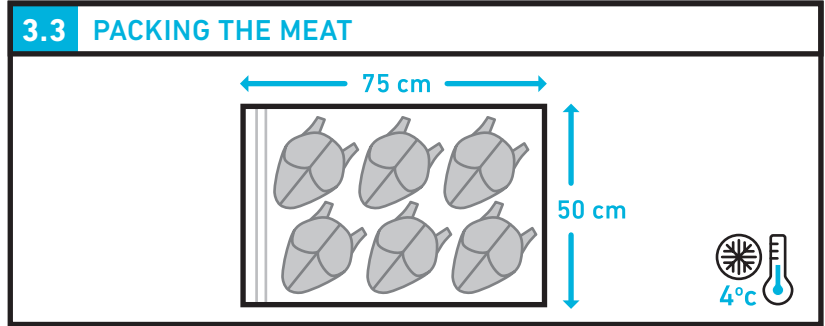


- Tie the pelts together by passing a rope through the flipper holes.
- Soak and cool them in sea water.
- Once cooled, store them in the hold, fur against fur and blubber against blubber.

These cooling and packing tips apply to both young and adult seals.



- Pour sea water into insulated containers before putting the meat in (water temperature must be 4° Celsius or less).
- Make sure that the various parts of the seal are placed in separate bins (hearts with hearts, carcasses with carcasses, etc.)
- Use a hose to circulate cold water in the container.
- Rotate the hose from bin to bin regularly.

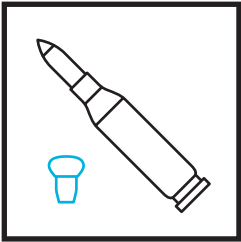


- **Once the meat is cooled**, transfer it to 50 x 75 cm (20" x 30") food-grade bags.
- Place the various parts of the seal in separate bags (hearts with hearts, carcasses with carcasses, etc.)
- Store the bags in the hold at 4° Celsius or less.



1. SEAL FINGER:

Seal finger (also known as la marine in the Îles-de-la-Madeleine) is a bacterial infection that can be contracted through cuts while working with seal meat. The person will experience severe pain and redness or swelling in the affected finger or hand. If you have these symptoms, see a doctor and show them this section of the Guide.



2. LEAD CONTAMINATION:

Lead-free bullets, such as 100% copper, should be used wherever possible, as lead contaminates meat and the environment. Otherwise, care should be taken to remove all the bullet debris around the wound, ideally within a radius of 10 cm around the entry hole.

Caution: full metal jacket bullets are prohibited for seal hunting.



3. TOXOPLASMOSIS:

This infection can have serious consequences on the development of the fetus in pregnant women. It is caused by a parasite that is sometimes found in various seal tissues. To eliminate the risk, simply freeze the meat at -10° Celsius for at least three days before preparing and consuming it.



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